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ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

LÉOPOLD DE CHÉRANCÉ

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ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

BY VERY REV.

LÉOPOLD DE CHÉRANCÉ, O.S.F.C.

SOLE AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY

R. F. O'CONNOR

TRANSLATOR OF "ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI" AND "ST. MARGARET OF CORTONA,
THE MAGDALEN OF THE SERAPHIC ORDER," BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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**HENRICUS S. BOWDEN,
CENSOR DEPUTATUS.**

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LETTERS OF APPROVAL

WE have read the *Life of St. Clare of Assisi*, by the Very Rev. Father Léopold de Chérancé. Not only have we found nothing which would prevent its publication, but we are convinced that this work will contribute towards a just appreciation of the contemplative life, so misunderstood in our days, the admirable fruitfulness and energizing powers of which the virgin of Assisi more than any other has revealed.

FATHER HILARY OF BARENTON
(*Lector in Theology*),

FATHER LADISLAS OF VANNES.

We willingly authorize Father Léopold de Chérancé to publish the *Life of St. Clare*. We wish this work the success of its predecessors.

FATHER ADOLPHUS OF BOUZILLÉ
(*Minister Provincial of the Province
of Paris*).

PARIS,
July 7, 1901
(*Feast of St. Laurence of Brindisi*).

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

A WORK dealing with hagiography from the pen of the French Capuchin, Father Léopold de Chérancé, needs very few words of introduction. His *Lives of St. Francis, St. Anthony of Padua, and St. Margaret of Cortona*, already translated—the first-named having reached its seventh edition in French and its third edition in English—have made his name as well and favourably known outside of France as in it ; his *Life of the Seraphic Patriarch* especially having received the highest ecclesiastical approbation and elicited unqualified commendations from the most capable reviewers. The present work, it is hoped, will meet a felt want in supplying what has long been needed—a *Life of St. Clare of Assisi* in English. It is the fitting complement of Father Leopold's *Life of St. Francis*, portraying in the same graphic and attractive style one who most closely resembled the Saint of Assisi, of whom she was the faithful imitator and co-worker.

If her personality does not impress the historic imagination so forcibly as that of St. Francis ; if her figure does not stand out so prominently as his does among the Saints of her epoch ; if she keeps, as it were, in the background, it is obviously because of the particular place and mission assigned to her.

She had none the less her share, and a large share, in the reformative and regenerative movement initiated by the son of Pietro Bernardone. "It would be difficult," says a writer* who has devoted much thought and study to an appreciation of that movement, "to estimate how much the silent influence of the gentle Abbess did towards guiding the women of medieval Italy to higher aims. In particular, Clare threw around poverty that irresistible charm which only women can communicate to religious or civic heroism, and she became a most efficacious coadjutrix of St. Francis in promoting that spirit of unworldliness which, in the counsels of God, was to bring about a restoration of discipline in the Church, and of morals and civilization among the people of Western Europe. . . . So far as St. Clare was concerned, St. Francis was always living, and nothing is perhaps more striking in her after-life than her unswerving loyalty to the ideals of the Poverello and the jealous care with which she clung to his rule and teaching." Though living her life of austere abnegation and silent prayer behind cloister walls, she was a purifying presence in the midst of a corrupt world, which she helped to recall to the half-forgotten simplicity and self-denial of the early Christian ages. Her humility was a contrast and a rebuke to the social pride which divided classes, when feudalism predominated, by sharper lines of demarcation than now; her gentleness to the rivalries and spirit of vendetta, which made her countrymen ready to fly at each other's throats on

* Father Paschal Robinson, O.F.M., *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. iv., art. "St. Clare."

the slightest provocation ; her unalterable attachment to poverty and to the simplest of simple lives, to their fondness for pomp and pleasures, inherited, doubtless, from their pagan ancestors, who hungered so much for their *panem et circenses*.

This volume completes a trilogy illustrative of three aspects of love, the law of life, pre-eminently of the higher life : St. Francis typifying seraphic love—the love that raises the rational human soul nearest to the Source of Love in its purest essence ; St. Clare, virginal love—the love of those chaste souls to whom is accorded the privilege of following the Lamb without spot “ whithersoever He goeth ” ; and St. Margaret of Cortona, penitent love—the love of her whose panegyric was first pronounced by Divine lips in the Pharisee’s house, and to whom many sins were forgiven — *quia multum dilexit*.

In an extended Appendix are given the full text of St. Clare’s Testament and Blessing, and the Bull of Pope Alexander IV. promulgating her canonization, as well as a list of Saints and Beatae of the Second Order of St. Francis, now known as Poor Clares. The translator has endeavoured to render into English the Bull as given by the celebrated Irish historian of the Friars Minor, Father Luke Wadding, in his monumental work, the Annals of the Order.* Loccatelli† has given a free translation of it in Italian—so free, indeed, that the translator may almost be said to have rewritten it. It is difficult, if not impossible, to do justice to it in a trans-

* *Annal. Minor., an. 1255.*

† *Vita d. S. Chiara di Asisi, p. 271 et. seq.*

lation. The Latin original is a masterpiece of felicitous diction, the Pontiff making the Saint's name, Clara, the keynote or *motif* of his theme. It runs through the whole Papal pronouncement like the ground-tone or dominant note of an exquisite symphony.

R. F. O'CONNOR

INTRODUCTION

THE good alone has a right to our admiration ; evil, in all its forms, only deserves to be stigmatized.

It is the glory of the Catholic Church, in its official acts as in its Liturgy, to praise only what is worthy of praise—true greatness, unfading beauty. Now, throughout the ages there is nothing great but Christ, Who dominates them, and there is nothing beautiful but souls who resemble Him, those upon whom is reflected the brightness of His face—that is to say, the Saints—all the Saints.

The Saints are the élite of humanity, adorned and restored by grace. All are great, all are beautiful, in proportion to their participation in the infinite perfections of the Redeemer. They contain in themselves the treasure of their immaterial beauty, an inestimable treasure, but hidden in so far as their humility strives to conceal it from our knowledge. To know them it needs that circumstances should do them a holy violence, and open for us the treasury of their heart. But this treasury once opened, it suffices to gain for them universal esteem, to show them such as they are.

It is with this firm confidence of success that we present to our readers, with truth for its only embellishment, the life of the illustrious compatriot of St. Francis, Chiara Scea of Assisi.

In perusing the old chronicles devoted to her glory we have been not a little surprised, in fact, to find, in place of the sombre portrait habitually depicted, a rather sprightly character, a frank and loyal nature, a soul of seraphic aspirations, moulded on faith and love, and become one of those heroines who most honour humanity, the Foundresses of Religious Orders. With the discovery of this precious pearl, a great soul, arose in us a lively sentiment of admiration, which we did not wish to keep to ourselves alone. Heroic souls are so rare, and they are so beautiful !

Our work is not put forth with the allurements of learning and erudition. It is a work composed by a believer who addresses himself to other believers, with no other aim than to edify them. However, historical integrity imposes on us the duty of indicating the sources whence we have derived our information and the purpose we have in view.

I. THE SOURCES.

The sources are not numerous. They are reduced to four or five, and, again, they only afford very summary details about our Saint.

1. *Thomas of Celano*.—First of all is the biography inserted in the *Acta Sanctorum* at the 12th of August under the title *Vita Anonyma*, and which several writers wrongly assign to St. Bonaventure. Two eminent critics, Cozza-Luzzi and Paul Sabatier,* give us the name of the author. It is Thomas of Celano. Already, before them, Papini† and Sbar-

* Paul Sabatier, *Speculum Perfectionis*, p. lxxv.

† *Notizia Sicure*, p. 128.

aglia* had made the same discovery, and the first had affirmed that the original text was, as it actually is, among the manuscripts of the Laurentian Library in Florence.

Thomas of Celano, a disciple of the Poverello of Assisi, and contemporary of our heroine, was the appointed historian of the early times of the Order. He is an authority on all that concerns the origin of the Franciscan Order. It is, then, to perform an act of justice to restore to him what belongs to him, and in the course of this history we shall quote him as being the author of the *Vita Anonyma* in the *Acta Sanctorum*. He declares in the preface that he has been officially commissioned to execute this work "by the Pope, who has inscribed the heroine of Assisi in the calendar of virgins"—that is to say, by Alexander IV. He adds that he has taken every possible means to procure information, and that he has only written according to the formal attestations of eye-witnesses—the Poor Ladies and Friars Minor. His evidence, then, is of indisputable value. His little work is divided into seven chapters, which enable us to follow the Saint from her birth to her canonization.

The other historians of St. Francis, the Three Companions (Leo, Angelo, and Rufino) and St. Bonaventure (*Legend of St. Francis*), have only a few lines about St. Clare and the beginning of her Order, and reveal to us no new fact.

2. *Speculum Perfectionis* (*The Mirror of Perfection*) (Paris, 1898), an anonymous chronicle recently published by Paul Sabatier, who attributes its

* *Supplem. ad Script. Ord.*

authorship, but without positive proofs, to Brother Leo, the confidant, secretary, and privileged friend of the Seraphic Patriarch. There are, at least, chapters which are too eulogistic of him for it to have emanated from his pen. However that may be, this chronicle is very ancient, venerable, and one of the gems of the Middle Ages. We have borrowed three episodes from it, and our readers will see under what a delightful aspect they depict the supernatural affection and kinship of thought which united the Founder and Foundress.

3. *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals*, published in 1897 by the Quaracchi Fathers (*Analecta Franciscana*, t. iii.), a valuable chronological work which covers from 1209 to 1374, and is generally attributed to Friar Arnould of Serrano, a Franciscan of the province of Aquitaine. The author had in his hands manuscripts now mislaid or lost. He mentions here and there the name of St. Clare. The special notice he devotes to her has, unfortunately, only a secondary interest. It is contained in a page, and ends with an anecdote taken from the *Fioretti*. We owe to him the original text of a letter from Agnes to our Saint.

4. *Seraphicæ Legislationis Textus Originales* (Quaracchi, 1897). This volume contains, among other documents, the Rule and the Testament of St. Clare.

5. *Bullarium Franciscanum*, published by Father Sbaraglia (Rome, 1759). The *Bullarium* furnishes us with official documents and rescripts of the Roman Court.

These different documents and the acts of the process of the canonization of St. Clare serve as a

groundwork to the narratives of the writers of subsequent ages. Among the latter it is fitting to cite in the first rank Bartholomew of Pisa,* Mariano of Florence, and St. Antoninus; then the Annalists, properly so called, of the Franciscan family—Mark of Lisbon, Rodolph of Tossignano, and Wadding. They must be read, one and all, with caution, because they seek too much after the marvellous, and sometimes confound legend with history. But with this precaution we may derive profit from their supplementary information, as we have done in the case of one of them, Mariano of Florence, a chronicler of the fifteenth century, whom Sbaraglia praises very highly.† Besides several small works and sermons, all unpublished, Mariano has left us two treatises on St. Clare, one which is an abridged biography, the other which, under the title of *Conformities with Christ and Mary*, branches out into pious considerations on the virtues and miracles of the Saint.‡

Two modern authors, Vincenzo Loccatelli§ and Cristofani,|| fellow-countrymen and great admirers of our Saint, have undertaken on her account critical

* *Book of the Conformities* (fourteenth century), Bologna edition, 1590.

† *Supplement. ad. Script. Ord.*, p. 518.

‡ The work of Mariano on *St. Clare and the Poor Clares* is fundamentally drawn from the manuscripts of the National Library of Florence (Magliabecchi, xxxvii., 226); the same with Volterra and Vallicelliana of Rome. See the *Tractatus de Portiuncula* of Bartholi, Paul Sabatier's edition, pp. 137-164. It is desirable that the Fathers of Quaracchi should give us a complete edition of the works of the Florentine chronicler.

§ *Life of St. Clare*, Assisi, 1854.

|| *History of Assisi*, Assisi, 1875; *History of St. Damian's*, 1882.

and erudite studies which facilitate the researches of the historian. But, it must be confessed, the more abundant the hagiographical sources are when it concerns St. Francis, the rarer they are for his coadjutrix.

After having affirmed the paucity of primitive documents, we deem it a duty to inform our readers of the motive which inspired these pages.

II. OUR DESIGN.

Our object is not to reveal an unknown St. Clare ; nor to solve all the historical problems which her life presents ; nor, from a critical point of view, to form an appreciation of all the studies concerned with her. Our aims are at once higher and more modest. We wish, above all, to sketch the moral features of the daughter of the Scefi, and to replace this grand figure in its natural framework. We also wish to draw from her monograph the lofty lessons it contains ; to propose her as an example to nuns and the numerous faithful who invoke her ; to display in a clearer light her work as a Foundress ; and, when needed, to defend the cause of the Contemplative Order against calumnies continually revived. Hence, the choice of the author to be followed was clearly indicated. Who, in fact, better than Thomas of Celano, the contemporary and friend of the seraphic virgin, can tell us of her active share in the reform of the thirteenth century ? who better than he can transmit to us the secret of the heroic acts or supernatural communications which had gladdened the solitude of St. Damian's ? For all

these reasons, it is upon him we shall rely. It is he who will speak from one end to the other of this volume, and the present biography will, in reality, be only a detailed commentary of the seven chapters of his.

His little works have the great inconvenience of being often of discouraging conciseness, and omitting a number of points to which moderns attach extreme importance. We question him, and he does not reply. Often nothing can make up for his silence. But at least he will make us know and love the Saint. He will unveil to us the magnanimity of her character, the noble emotions of her heart, the heroism of her virtues. We cannot know all, but at least what he will tell us will bear the double stamp of veracity in the evidence and authenticity in the facts.

The moment seems to us favourable for tracing the noble and captivating figure of St. Clare, and presenting it to our contemporaries. It is a time when romance, the theatre, and the Press conspire in hideous complicity to destroy all notions of justice and injustice ; when pen and pencil debase themselves so far as to try to rehabilitate the most unmentionable passions,* to be the apologists of vice. Is it, on the contrary, not the time to proclaim the attractions and imperishable beauty of virtue, and to show forth its splendour in one of those great souls who are the honour of human nature ? And have we not reason to hope that in opposing to so

* It is to be presumed that the author alludes to the anti-Christian section of the French Press and the pornographic literature which unhappily abounds in that country.—TRANSLATOR.

many unhealthy excitements the spectacle of duty fulfilled, of marvellous manifestations, of faith and the glory of self-sacrifice, our voice will again find an echo in hearts in which the sense of the beautiful and the ideal is not extinct ?

We submit our appreciations and the whole volume, like its predecessors, to the judgment of the Infallible Doctor, and humbly lay it at his feet with the homage of our filial veneration and our most respectful sentiments.

FATHER LÉOPOLD DE CHÉRANCÉ

(Priest of the Order of Friars

Minor Capuchin).

PARIS, *May* 8, 1901.

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ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

CHAPTER I

A PREDICTION BY ST. FRANCIS (1207)

"It seems," writes Ozanam, "that nothing great can appear in the Church without a woman having a share in it."*

The reflection is just, and founded on history. Everywhere, in fact, in the course of ages we see woman participating in the noblest creations of Christianity, and bringing thereto a concurrence as generous as it is spontaneous. It is the realization of the mysterious law which was promulgated at the beginning of the world and sanctioned on Calvary: "Adam was alone, and the Lord said: Let us give him a helpmate like unto himself and complete him. The one shall be strength, the other meekness; the one shall think, the other love; both shall sing a hymn to the glory of their Creator"—a law producing supernatural harmonies which draw heroic souls together, stamps them with the impress of an admirable fraternity, and places in the same historic framework, environed with one and the same glory, Monica and Augustine, Paula and Jerome, Scholastica and Benedict, and, after them,

* Dante's *Purgatorio*, 568.

the two Saints with whom we are concerned—Francis and Clare of Assisi.

Francis and Clare of Assisi—two exquisitely delightful figures; which are simultaneously named and complete each other, inseparable in the history of the Middle Ages as in their glory beyond the tomb, equally attractive in the unity of their vocation and the sublimity of their virtues.

And of the two St. Francis should come first. He was the son of a rich merchant, Pietro Bernardone Moriconi, of a lively temperament, capable of great undertakings, and endowed with all the charms which captivate the imagination. His fellow-townsmen had named him "the King of Youth"; which he was, in fact, still more by his qualities of mind and heart than by the superiority of fortune. To form an idea of the fascination he exercised it is necessary to picture him to the imagination such as his first disciples have portrayed him: delicate and pleasant features, red lips, black, sparkling eyes, alert of carriage, and with a mind open to all noble ideas. He loved movement and light, scattered money about freely, was the social leader of companions devoted to gaiety and poetry, and took delight in going through the streets of Assisi with young men of his own age humming the heroic poems of the Provençal troubadours—a life of worldliness and dissipation, but without any of those moral lapses which fill homes with sorrow.

It was this young man whom the Lord chose to make the instrument of His mercy, the demolisher of antisocial errors, the outcome of Manicheism; the liberator of the Papacy in one of the

most mournful crises it has passed through. Let us not seek from heaven the secret of a predilection for which it has not to account to anyone ; let us rather consider with what power and suddenness it snatches the son of Pietro Bernardone from all worldly frivolities to attain its ends.

One morning Francis was walking beneath the walls of Assisi, earnestly preoccupied with the thought of his future. Seeing an old dilapidated church dedicated to St. Damian on the slopes of the Apennines, he enters, and there, in solitude unburthening his heart, he throws himself on his knees before a Byzantine painting representing Jesus on the Cross, and beseeches the supreme Arbiter of human destinies to enlighten him on his vocation. Suddenly the lips of Christ become animated, and thrice repeat these mysterious words : " Go, Francis, and repair My house, which thou seest falling to ruin."*

From that hour he is transformed. " The King of Youth " becomes the herald of the Monarch of Heaven, the knight of Christ, the patriarch of the poor. He hastily restores the material ruins of the three abandoned churches—St. Damian's, St. Peter's, and Our Lady of Angels : " symbols," says St. Bonaventure, " of the three Orders he is to found."† Then he thinks of the spiritual ruins, and there what labour and what obstacles confront him ! He gathers around him generous hearts, who embrace his idea, renouncing everything to follow

* *Tres Socii*, c. v. ; Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Claræ*, c. i. (*apud Acta SS.*).

† St. Bonaventure, *Vita S. Francisci*, c. ii.

him, and, like him, enamoured of that Divine folly of the Cross which has saved the world. They are the first-fruits of the Order of Friars Minor. Francis brings them together under the shadow of the Chapel of the Portiuncula, which he has just restored; he deeply impresses on their minds the sublimity of their vocation, prepares them for the struggles which await them, then sends them into Umbria and Tuscany, a few everywhere, to preach peace and labour for the conversion of their erring brethren. They are twelve; soon they will be legion, a legion of apostolic friars, and it is with them the Poverello will renew the face of Italy. But meanwhile, and almost at the inception of the work, another picked battalion comes, and ranges itself under his banner; it is a battalion of virgins, resolved to combat by silent prayer while he is combating with the spoken word.

The woman of prayer alongside the apostle! The Seraphic Patriarch is initiated into the secrets of that Divine law as far as it concerns him. In the vision at St. Damian's, by the light of Divine illuminations, he has had a glimpse of his coadjutrix, the magnificence of the part she is to fill, and the glories of the sanctuary that shall shelter her and her companions. And that sanctuary is St. Damian's. "Go," the Voice says to him, "and repair My house, which is falling to ruin." He obeys, and it is by that very material restoration he inaugurates his mission, and preludes the moral restorations of the future. He goes through the streets of his native city, begging for stones, and saying with admirable simplicity: "He who shall give me one stone shall

have one reward ; who shall give me two shall have two ; who shall give me three shall have three.”* Then he goes down to St. Damian’s, makes use of the materials himself, raises the ruins of the old monument, and spends his time and his strength upon this work with the love and joy of the turtle-dove that builds a nest for her brood in the solitude of the woods. “ Come,” he cries to the passers-by, “ come and help me to finish ; for you shall see flourishing here a convent of poor ladies, whose holy life and reputation shall cause the Heavenly Father to be glorified throughout the whole of Christendom.”†

It is in 1207 he thus unveils to his fellow-townsmen a corner of the picture, a glimpse of the marvels the future holds. But who is the virgin who will fill with virgins and their canticles the solitude of St. Damian’s ? Whence will she come ? What is her name ? He does not know. He is content with preparing a dwelling adapted to what he knows of the designs of Providence, and waits.

Meanwhile she whom the Popes shall later call “ the Duchess of the Poor ” is growing up in silence and peace under the shadow of the paternal roof. We are going to see the Most High beckon to her, and lead her, as it were, by the hand to the end He has in view, and of which St. Francis has had a glimpse.

* *Tres Socii*, c. vii.

† *Ibid.* St. Clare has inserted this prophecy in her Testament in almost identical terms.

CHAPTER II

A PREDESTINED SOUL (1194-1212)

CLARE was born at Assisi in 1194, of the patrician family of the Scefi,* then, according to Thomas of Celano, accounted among the wealthiest and most important of the little city.† Favorino, her father, was Count of Sasso-Rosso.‡ He belonged to that knightly race, so brilliant at the epoch of the Crusades, who regarded the military profession as a sacred institution and the grandest appanage of the nobility, and appeared to esteem only military glory; and one may conclude that, with her two

* The archives of the Poor Clares of Assisi designate the family name, and the chronicle of Mariano of Florence (*Saints of the Second Order*, chap. v.) fixes the date of birth as 1194.

† "Pater miles . . . Domus abundans" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Claræ*, c. i.). The *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals*, speaking of Friar Rufino, cousin-german of St. Clare, uses expressions almost identical: "Fratr Rufinus Cipii . . . De nobilioribus civibus Assisii consanguineus S. Claræ . . ." (*Analecta Franciscana*, t. iii., p. 46). The Latin manuscripts sometimes write *Cipius*, sometimes *Scifius* or *Scefius*.

‡ The family arms, engraved on the mausoleum of his grandsons (in the cemetery of the Sacro Convento), make allusion to this noble title of Sasso-Rosso (Red Rock). They are arms which tell their story (V. Loccatelli, *Life of St. Clare*, Introduction and Appendix III.).

younger brothers, Paul and Monaldo, it made great progress through Umbria.*

To the ancient blazon of the Scefi he had added that of the Fiumi, Lords of Sterpeto, and we know that his wife was named Ortolana.† She was a woman of strong faith, who was not afraid to undertake the perilous pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and afterwards those of Monte Gargano and St. Peter's at Rome.

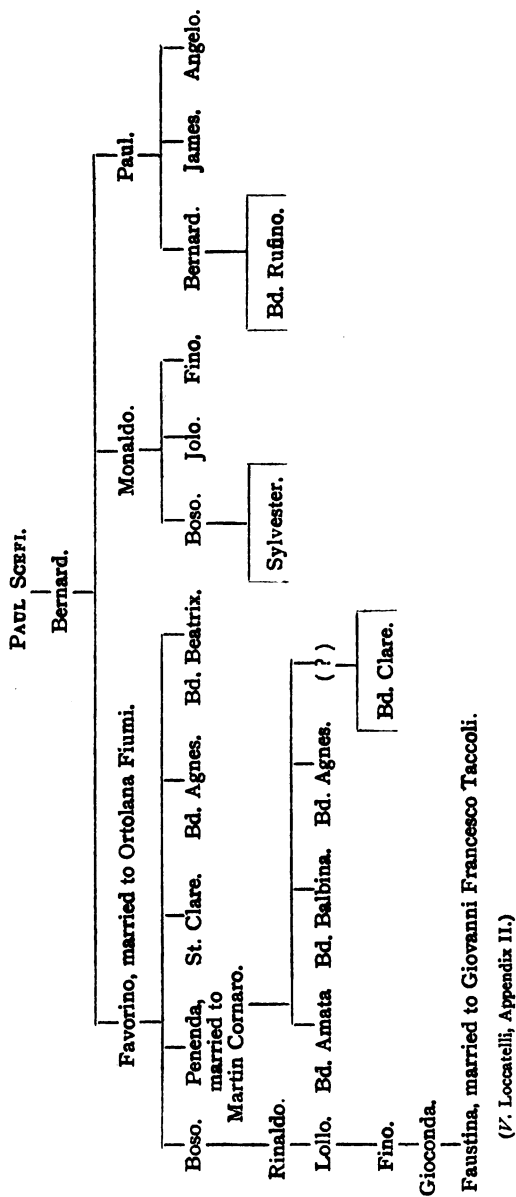
Favorino and Ortolana occupied, in the richest and most frequented quarter of Assisi, a palace, the imposing ruins of which are still to be seen quite near the Porta Vecchia. God blessed their union, and Ortolana gave birth to five children: a son, Don Boso, mentioned among the twenty-four nobles who were present at the canonization of the martyr Stanislaus, Bishop of Cracow;‡ and four daughters—Penenda, Clare, Agnes, and Beatrix. Don Boso and Penenda married, and the Blessed Bernardine of Feltri, who was preaching at Assisi in 1485, states that he had the pleasure of there greeting their

* Wadding, *ad ann.* 1212. The chroniclers are in agreement as to the names of the three brothers Scefi, but not as to the order of their primogeniture. See on the following page the genealogical tree of the Scefi, drawn out by Loccatelli according to the archives of the Poor Clares of Assisi.

† "Hortulana" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. i., and Bull, *Clara Claris*). It is the Franciscan Bernardine of Feltri who has revealed to us the patronymical name of Ortolana—Fiumi (V. Loccatelli, Introduction, p. 33, and Cristofani, *Hist. of Assisi*, l. i, p. 70). The line of the Fiumi is now represented by Count Alessandro Fiumi.

‡ "D. Boso domini Favorini de Saxo-Rubeo" (V. Loccatelli, Introduction and Appendix III.). It is this same Boso who is designated, with all his titles, in the inscription on the tomb of the Scefi: "Burial-place of the sons of Rinaldo, son of Lord Boso, Count of Sasso-Rosso" (V. Loccatelli, *loc. cit.*).

GENEALOGICAL TREE OF THE FAMILY OF THE SCEFI,
COUNTS OF SASSO-ROSSO.



descendants.* Penenda married a gentleman named Martin Cornaro,† and we shall soon come across three of her children in the course of our narrative.

Next comes Clare, the luminous star around whom gravitate her two younger sisters, Agnes and Beatrix—Clare, the third child of Ortolana, but the first by the lustre of her merit as by the splendour of her virtues, she who in reality has immortalized the name of Scefi. It is she who is henceforth going to engage our attention.

Even before her birth the marvellous shines round her, and comes to gladden the paternal dwelling. One day when Ortolana, anxious, like all mothers, was pouring out her tears and her prayers at the foot of a crucifix, and imploring the protection of Heaven for herself and at the same time for the fruit of her womb, she heard a voice, which said to her : “ Fear naught, Ortolana ; thou shalt happily bring into the world a light which shall enlighten the whole universe.”‡

The event closely followed the promise. The infant came into the world on July 16, 1194. She received the regenerating water of baptism in the baptistery of the Cathedral of St. Rufino, at the very sacred font where the son of Pietro Bernardone had been presented twelve years before ;§ and Dona Ortolana, in memory of the angelic prediction,

* Wadding, *ad ann.* 1212.

† V. Loccatelli, Introduction.

‡ “ Lumen salva parturies, quod mundum universum clarius illustrabit ” (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. i.).

§ This sacred font has escaped the ravages of time. A Latin inscription recalls the baptism of St. Francis.

wished that she should be given the beautiful name of Clare.*

"Could she have made a fitter choice for that soul, beautiful as a flower gemmed by a dewdrop and a sunbeam, pure as the snow on Alpine summits, charming and gracious as a smile from the good God? Contrasted with the birth of other children, always accompanied with cries and tears, Clare's birth was a joyful birth to her mother; she had come into the world with a smile on her lips. During the whole time she was at the breast this reflection of heavenly happiness was observed. Was it the splendour of her guardian angel, or the lustre of the treasures hidden by God in her young soul? No one knew. But, seeing her growing up, already counting by means of little stones the Hail Marys she was saying, pious even in her plays, gentle and patient, ever serene and joyful, easily moved to pity and tender to the unhappy, one always remembered the sweet maternal appellation—Clara, Clare. That name hovered in some sort over the child like a protecting aureola, like the crown of sparkling stones of which the Bible speaks : *Dabit capite suo augmenta gratiarum, et corona inclitya proteget te.*"†

The daughter of the Scesti was always an angel of innocence and piety. While still a little child she loved to hear people speak of God, and meditated in her own way on the sublime lessons of the Gospel. Better still, she already resolutely put them in practice. At an age when other young girls are only thinking of dress and frivolous amusements she was

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. i.

† Rev. Father Leo, *Panegyric of St. Clare*, p. 4.

already subjecting her delicate flesh to the laws of mortification, "and under an elegant exterior, in accord with her position, she wore a hair-shirt, which, although a little curtailed, was none the less a hair shirt."* It is the remark of her historian.

There was nothing narrow or selfish in her piety, and Thomas of Celano is pleased to tell us that the distinctive feature of her moral physiognomy was kindness—an active kindness which showed itself outwardly. "Early initiated in all sorts of good works by Dona Ortolana (and higher praise cannot be given to a mother), she received with affability the little ones, the poor, the infirm, without being put about by their ever-increasing number. She reached out a helping hand to them, and relieved their misery from the abundance of her father's house."† She gave to all, accompanying her gifts with a smile or a kind word, which increased their worth. She diffused joy around her; she had it already in her heart, for she heard sounding in the inmost recesses of her memory the promise of the Divine Master: "*Mihi fecistis*. Child, it is I who am hidden under the rags of these wretched creatures. Child, it is to Me thou givest."

"Oh, angelic child!" exclaims her biographer; "she was a vessel of election, a golden vase filled with exquisite perfumes, whose good odour gradually spread over the hillside of Assisi. Rumours of the acts of devotedness with which her faith inspired her passed from place to place;‡ and when she went

* "*Ciliciolum*" (*Vita S. Clare*, c. i.).

† "*Supplebat inopias plurimorum*" (*Vita S. Clare*, loc. cit.).

‡ "*Vas purissimum; vas gratiarum . . . Rumor bonitatis ejus vulgabatur in populo*" (*Vita S. Clare*, c. i.).

through the streets of the city, the townsfolk respectfully saluted her, saying to one another admiringly : ' It is she ! It's the gracious daughter of the Scefì ! ' "

Such was our heroine in her pleasant life at Sasso-Rosso : open-hearted by nature, and full of attractions, with a quick intelligence, a sensitive and compassionate heart, but capable at need of the most virile energy. To such a precious blending of qualities and nascent virtues she joined those charming externals by which the world is always attracted — " a slender figure, majestic carriage, fresh and ruddy complexion, fine and delicate features, framed by a pretty head of hair of golden hue."* Her parents, delighted to see her possessed of such advantages, only thought of settling her in the world ; but the Heavenly Father, who had other designs upon her, was going to shatter all their projects, and take possession of her heart with irresistible power.

* V. Loccatelli, l. i., c. i., p. 56.

CHAPTER III

VOCATION (1212)

THE invisible Lover of souls has two ways of conquering them—*fortiter* and *suaviter*, by force and sweetness. He stops and lays prostrate the son of Pietro Bernardone on his road of Damascus, and snatches him, trembling and aghast, from the tyranny of human desires : there is force. It is by sweetness, by the gentle voice of the “ new convert,” he will take captive the daughter of Ortolana.

It was during the Lent of 1212. Francis was preaching at Assisi, in the Church of St. George. He was still in the beginning of his movement, but, endowed with inspired oratory, he had the gift of swaying multitudes, and, despite the proverb which has it “ that no one can be a prophet in his own country,” he charmed his fellow-citizens by his unction and originality, and by the holy boldness of his utterances. The Bishop of Assisi had made no mistake in entrusting to him the pulpit of St. George’s, although he was only a simple deacon.

Clare, wishful of knowing an apostle whose praise was in all mouths, got leave one day to go with her mother and her sister Agnes to be present at one of his instructions. She sees, hears, and admires him, and from that moment selects him as the director

and guide of her soul. She discloses her intention to a widow worthy of all her confidence, Bona Guelfucci, her aunt, and repairs with her in the greatest secrecy to Our Lady of Angels. When he sees her, the face of the Umbrian reformer beams with joy ; he remembers the vision of St. Damian's, and is impressed with the belief that she who stands there before him, the heiress of the Scefì, the pearl of the city, is precisely the coadjutrix Providence has in reserve. At once he unveils to her the excellence of virginity, the ineffable beauty of the Heavenly Spouse, and the supernatural joys of a union which time cannot destroy.* Then he converses with her on what she has most at heart : the sufferings of the Church, the necessity of expiations, the value of a tear shed in God's presence, the charms and power of his " lady and sovereign," Poverty—of that poverty which inspired him with words like these : " Oh, who would not love my lady Poverty, she who makes us sharers in the privileges of redemption and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven ?"

Clare listens in astonishment and rapture. Meanwhile grace speaks to her heart, and the Saviour whispers to her : " Come and follow Me !" Her choice is made ; she will break all bonds of earth, even the most legitimate, even those of the family, to only belong to the immortal King of Ages, and will go and dwell with Him on the heights of Golgotha.

She had again, according to her biographer, several interviews with the venerable founder at very close intervals, and always in the most

* " *Instillat dulcia connubia Christi* " (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. i.).

absolute secrecy,* for she foresaw obstinate opposition on the part of her family. Like all who have heard the call from on high, she was impatient to give herself entirely to God, and the days which separated her from the sacred and definite alliance for which she longed appeared to her ages. The Seraphic Patriarch, on his part, "fearing that this delicate and beautiful flower would wither in the poisoned atmosphere of the world, thought it was time to transplant her into the garden enclosed of the religious life."† It was then agreed that this great act should take place on Palm Sunday night in the Chapel of the Portiuncula, and unknown to her parents, to avoid a struggle of which they dreaded the issue.

The affair was grave in itself, full of responsibilities, and, moreover, within ecclesiastical jurisdiction; so, one cannot doubt but that the founder was invested with the powers requisite for the occasion. A modern author, however, has denied it, and allowed himself to write: "Francis, he, a simple deacon, *arrogated to himself the right* to receive St. Clare's vows. Such an act should have drawn down upon its author all the censures of the Church, but Francis was already one of those powers to whom much is pardoned, even when one speaks in the name of the Holy Roman Church."‡

* "Visitat sæpius . . . clandestinos frequentabat accessus" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. i.). The old chronicler particularly insists on the *absolute secrecy* which Clare and Francis observed until the ceremony of clothing. It is this motive which impels us to reject as an invention the phrase Bartholomew of Pisa attributes to the founder: "Go and beg if thou wishest that I should believe in thy vocation" (*L. Conformit.*, part ii., l. i., fr. 8).]

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. i.

‡ Paul Sabatier, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, c. ix.

St. Francis "arrogating to himself this right of receiving vows" unduly! St. Francis thus transformed into a contemner of ecclesiastical discipline! Certainly the imputation is novel; but is it founded? It is true that the chronicler who serves us as a guide does not breathe a word about the requisite jurisdiction, but what does his silence prove? Could he foresee an objection against which all the words and acts of the Poverello, and also the verbal concessions or diplomas of contemporary Popes, protested beforehand? It must not be forgotten that in 1209 Innocent III., *viva voce*, had granted full jurisdiction to the Umbrian reformer "to preach penance to all and in all places":* to all—to clerics as well as to the laity, to women as well as to men, to married persons as well as to virgins. This Pontifical favour throws light on the whole dispute. After the ceremony of clothing, Honorius III., Gregory IX., and Innocent IV. will successively have occasion to treat of the origin of the Second Order.† One will not catch a single word of blame or protestation from their lips, and Innocent IV. can insert in the Bull of definite approval, without restriction or reserve, the following attestation: "In the beginning of her conversion Clare promised to obey St. Francis, and likewise her companions after her."‡

The conclusion forces itself upon us: the Roman Church pardoned nothing because it had nothing to pardon, and we venture to think that such an eminent critic as Paul Sabatier, realizing that he has

* "Omnibus poenitentiam prædicare" (*Tres Socii*, c. xii.).

† *Bullar. Francisc.*, t. i. and ii.

‡ *Textus Originales*; Bull *Solet Annuere*, p. 52.

flung at St. Francis an accusation evidently calumnious, will hasten to retract it.

Acting in accordance with the authority of the Roman Curia, the Patriarch of Assisi, it seems to us, was none the less in accord with that of the Bishop of Assisi, Don Guido, "his spiritual guide, the protector, the learned and prudent friend without whose consent," the three companions tell us, "he undertook nothing."* And hence one will understand that, being certain of co-operating in a Divine work, he proceeds with the agility and confidence of an ambassador who delivers a confidential message.

* *Tres Socii*, c. vi.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST (1212)

ON the 19th of March, 1212, the little city of Assisi was more astir than usual. The Church was celebrating the festival of Palm Sunday, and the faithful, olive-branches in hand, were hurrying to and taking their places, according as they entered, in the vast nave of the cathedral of St. Rufino. Clare was there, attentive and recollected, occupying a place of honour along with her family, and dressed in her best. "It was her formal farewell," observes our old chronicler,* "and St. Francis himself had arranged all the details," except the unforeseen; for there was that which was unforeseen, and Thomas of Celano has not failed to relate the curious episode which signalized that morning.

Was Clare absorbed listening to the melody of the Church's chaunts, enchanted by the majesty of the *Hosanna filio David*, or was she thinking of the storm her departure was going to raise? When, according to the Italian usage, the moment came to go and receive the blessed palms, she remained in her place, with her eyes modestly downcast. The Bishop, perceiving her, descended the sanctuary steps, and gave her the palm he had reserved for her;

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. i.

it was the emblem of the victories over the world she was to achieve, and at the same time a mute exhortation, the sense of which could not escape her penetrating mind. She was moved beyond all expression, but, being of a strongly-formed character, she did not let any of the feelings which stirred her appear, and after Mass she quietly went home with her suite. It was for the last time.

That night, at an hour when everybody was asleep, she left her father's house by a private door, and noiselessly, but not without difficulty, crossed the palings which closed the entrance to the palace. Free to fly whither the heavenly voices called her, radiant as a bride on her marriage day, her heart full of holy enthusiasm, the young fugitive, with a brisk step, and in company with some intimate friends,* went towards the chapel of Our Lady of the Angels, to there offer herself as a holocaust on the altar of Divine love. Francis and his companions had there kept "the vigil of arms" with the psalmody of the Office and prayer. Torches in hand, they went to meet the heroic young girl, and to the singing of canticles introduced her into the privileged sanctuary of Mary. Then, by the light of the tapers burning on the Lady altar, took place the scene of her spiritual espousals.†

Most impressive and never-to-be-forgotten scene ! It was midnight, the hour when more than once in that very sanctuary the seraphs of Heaven had

* Mariano of Florence names Christina Suppi of Assisi ; most of the chroniclers mention Bona Guelfucci, the Saint's earthly angel guardian ; Thomas of Celano says simply, *Cum honesta societate*.

† *Vita S. Claræ*, c. i.

consoled the son of Pietro Bernardone, their earthly brother ! The solitude of the place, full of mysteries ; the harmony of the sacred hymns celebrating the mystical nuptials of the Lamb ; and, still more, the sweet words which burst forth from the lips of the Poverello, infused into the soul of Clare a peace and delight which were not of the earth.

“ My daughter, what willest thou ? ” the Saint asked of her. “ God—the God of the Crib and of Calvary ! ” she replied with earnestness. “ I want no other treasure and no other inheritance. ” * Then, kneeling barefooted, she lays aside everything precious she has, her silken garments and her trinkets, which the Friars will distribute to the poor, according to the formal recommendation of the founder. The latter passes the scissors through her luxuriant tresses to signify her renunciation of earthly vanities. He puts upon her an ashen-grey habit, cinctures her with a coarse cord, and covers her head with a thick veil. † Then Clare, her eyes fixed on the image of the Queen of Heaven, pronounces her vows in a loud voice with that tone of emotion and sincerity which never deceives. She chooses Christ, poor and suffering, as her Spouse, swears fidelity to Him, and undertakes for the rest of her days to follow Him along the rugged paths of Calvary—not with the foolish enthusiasm an incredulous and mocking world supposes, but with the full freedom of a will mistress of itself, and

* “ Ut nihil præter Dominum Jesum vellet habere ” (*Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*).

† They still show at the Convent of St. Clare at Assisi the touching souvenirs of that clothing—the Saint’s hair, tunic and mantle.

an ardent courage which love alone renders superior to the allurements of nature.

Clare was only eighteen, and already she had the vanquished world under her feet—admirable victory, which raised her soul to heights unknown to antiquity, and imparted to her features something angelic. Agnes and Cecilia were not more charming when, in the darkness of the Catacombs, they consecrated to God the white lilies of their virginity.

Three years before, in the same chapel of Portiuncula, St. Francis had celebrated his espousals with poverty, "Christ's widow." The daughter of the Scefí had just renewed before the altar the same compact and with the same transport.* The marriage was consummated, a real marriage, indissoluble, superior to all human conceptions, and the proof of which was to be found in the transfigured life of our heroine. Clare was henceforth to have as her palace a narrow cell ; for jewels, poverty ; for manorial arms, the Cross. But at the same time—and we are only translating the mystical observation of her biographer—there took place between the Creator and the creature one of those exchanges which the angels of paradise would envy us if they could envy anyone. Clare brought her dowry, a virginal heart overflowing with love, and ready for any sacrifice. In return the immortal Spouse of souls placed on her finger the virginal ring, and on her brow the royal crown of foundresses, "set with all the diamonds of grace."†

With her, in fact, the Order of the Poor Ladies

* "Cum sancta paupertate fœdus iniit" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.).

† "Mente dictata" (*Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*).

was founded. "She was from the beginning not only its corner-stone, the chosen stone, but the foundress and the mother."* There was her special glory, as it was the glory of St. Francis to have been the initiator of that form of life. "And the birth-place of this new branch of the Franciscan family," let us add with the medieval chronicler, "the birth-place of the daughters of St. Clare, as well as of the Friars Minor, is the Portiuncula. So the seraphic Patriarch wished it, the better to affirm the relationship of the two militant forces, born of the same creative act, expanding under the same smile of the Virgin Mary, who equally extends her golden sceptre and azure mantle over one and the other."†

* "Lapis primarius ac nobile fundamentum" (*Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*).

† *Ibid.*, c. i.

CHAPTER V

TRIALS

THE ceremony of the religious profession over, the servant of God led Clare to the Convent of the Benedictines of St. Paul, situated, according to Cristofani, on the banks of the Chiascio, about two miles from the Portiuncula.* It was a provisional shelter pending the acquisition of St. Damian's.

Meanwhile they became aware of Clare's absence at the manor of Sasso-Rosso. Extreme was the surprise and exasperation of Favorino and Ortolana when they learned, through public rumour, of her nightly exit and her religious profession. Under the sway of a first impression, in which more affection than anger had a part, they ran to St. Paul's, found their daughter actually there, unrecognizable in the penitential garb, and summoned her to return to the paternal roof. "The onslaught was terrible,"† as the old chroniclers say. The father pleaded his rights, his ignored authority, the honour of his name exposed to the sarcasms of public malignity. The mother spoke the language of the heart: "Why this flight? Is it that we have molested thee in thy

* *History of St. Damian's*, c. x.

† "Violentiæ impetum adhibent, suadentes ab hujusmodi vilitate discedere" (*Vita S. Clare*, c. i.).

pious exercises ? Hast thou thought of the tears of thy sisters, Agnes and Beatrix ; of the wailings of the poor, who no more will see thee appear at the threshold of the castle ; of the grief of thy father and mother ?” With these reproaches and such like she mingled exclamations of tenderness, sobs, and the most pressing entreaties. Let those censure her and throw the first stone who know not what it is to be a mother and love !

Although intensely moved—and how could it be otherwise ?—Clare resisted unflinchingly the onsets of both. She protested her filial affection for them ; they were all that was dearest to her in the world. But God called her : should she not obey Him ? At these words she rises, uncovers her shaven head, clings with all her strength to the pillars of the altar, and exclaims : “ I belong to the Lord ; my vows are irrevocable, and nothing can detach me from His service !”*

On a similar occasion a father was so carried away by passion as to curse his son, and that son was St. Francis ! Favorino and Ortolana did not go to such an extremity. They withdrew with bruised hearts, but without recriminations, doubtless asking each other on the way what they should think of the angel’s prediction : “ Fear naught, Ortolana ; thou shalt happily bring into the world a light which shall enlighten the whole universe.” Perhaps they were hoping that time or the intervention of the Bishop of Assisi would bring about a modification of their daughter’s dispositions. They were deceived. It was she who was to convert them to her own sentiments,

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.

but at the cost of what anguish and suffering the course of events will tell us.

Scenes like that in the Convent of St. Paul, struggles with blood relations and the family, are those which break hearts and soften the strongest characters. To prevent their return, St. Francis decided to transfer the young bride of Christ for a few weeks to S. Angelo di Panzo, another Benedictine convent, built, if we are to believe Cristofani,* on the slopes of Monte Subazio. But he did not succeed in evading the dreaded storm which led to the vocation of Agnes.

Agnes Scefi, Clare's sister, was a young girl of fourteen, pure as a lily, gentle as a lamb, loving, and strongly attached to her eldest sister, for whom she professed a kind of worship.† Clare, seeing dawning in her the light of a beautiful intelligence, made for the contemplative life, and having great hopes of her, earnestly wished to have her as an auxiliary. She then begged the jealous God, Who finds His delight among the lilies, to cast a glance, a merciful glance, at that delicate flower, and to screen it from the storms of worldly passions. Her prayer was heard, and fifteen days after her arrival at St. Angelo of Panzo, Agnes went there to rejoin her, and say: "Sister, I wish to serve God along with you."‡

This new flight reopened the still bleeding wound made in Favorino's heart by Clare's departure. "He resembled," says a Portuguese author, "a lioness robbed of her young."§ As a father he wished at all costs to regain possession of his child.

* *History of St. Damian's*, c. x.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. iii. ‡ *Ibid.*

§ Mark of Lisbon, l. viii., c. vi.

Was it not his right ? Was it not his duty ? His brothers hurriedly gathered round him, shared his indignation, and swore to bring him back his daughter, dead or alive. Twelve men, relations or friends of the family, took up arms, and Monaldo, Favorino's brother, who had distinguished himself in the most glorious campaigns, undertook to lead them to the assault of the convent of St. Angelo of Panzo. There was a hot fight there, and our old chronicler has left us a description which pictures to the life the roughness of those times.

"The assailants at first dissembled under a pacific exterior their dark design ; then, without regard for the sanctity of the place, they invaded the cloister. One of them seized Agnes by the hair, and brutally dragged her across the rocks to throw her outside the convent precincts. The poor victim was all bleeding, and her garments in tatters. 'Sister,' she cried, 'come to my assistance, and don't let them wrench me away from the service of God.' Clare, seeing that the struggle was too unequal, had recourse to the arms of prayer, and, with eyes bathed in tears, she conjured the Lord to have compassion on the young girl who was suffering for Him, to envelop her with His omnipotence, and to grant her something of the masculine intrepidity of the martyrs. Immediately the young girl's body became so heavy that the abductors, succumbing under the burden, abandoned her at the bottom of a ravine. Peasants who ran to her assistance were equally unsuccessful in raising the body from the ground, and, joking at the miracle, said : 'She has been eating lead the whole night !' Quite ashamed

of such a defeat, Monaldo fumed with rage. Worse than that, in a fit of anger he raises a sacrilegious hand over his niece, and is going to pierce her with his sword ; but he could not consummate his crime : his arm stops, motionless and withered. Clare meanwhile arrives ; she conjures her relations to at least leave her the bleeding remains of Agnes, and they, troubled in mind and remorseful, end by withdrawing from the battlefield. Agnes at once rises, full of joy at this first victory won for Christ, and more decided than ever to consecrate to Him her heart and her life. St. Francis, enraptured at seeing such courage in such a very young girl, and moved by the ardour as well as the sincerity of her aspirations, deems that she deserves to be admitted to the virgins' banquet, and that it would be cruel to indefinitely delay her happiness. He prepares her for this breaking with the world, instructs her in the ways of religious perfection, and invests her with the insignia of penitence, previously adopted by the virgin Clare."*

The two brides of Christ, left to themselves, together taste the sweets of victory. " They felt themselves truly sisters by vocation, as well as by

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. iii. Was it at St. Angelo's, or was it at St. Damian's, that the clothing of Agnes took place ? The author does not precisely say. But St. Clare, in her Testament, is a little more explicit. Here is her declaration : " In concert with a few Sisters whom God had given me as companions after my own conversion, I made a vow of obedience at the hands of St. Francis : *cum paucis sororibus*. . . . And a short time after we came to settle at St. Damian's " (*Textus Originalis, Testament*, p. 273). At the head of these two or three first professed sisters does not the logic of facts lead us to place Agnes, although the venerable Abbess does not mention her ?

ties of blood,"* happy to be united among themselves, happier still to be united in God! Their hearts had been purified like gold in the crucible of tribulations; their characters were strengthened by combat; and by the light of the prodigy wrought in their favour they realized more clearly that the treasure of virginity is a reserved gift, an incomparably more precious gift than all the diamonds in the world. So it was in a perfect identity of views that they mutually congratulated themselves on having suffered something to preserve this treasure, and uplifted towards the invisible Spouse, who had so manifestly protected them, voices expressive of their common gratitude.

* "Carne et puritate germanam" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. iii.).

CHAPTER VI

THE RECONCILIATION

ASSISI has retained something of its quiet medieval aspect. It has remained one of those antique cities where all the inhabitants know each other, and where each takes a personal interest in all that concerns the traditions, monuments, and local life of the place. In these conditions an event so considerable as the skirmish of S. Angelo di Panzo could not pass unnoticed. The news spread like a train of powder in the different quarters of the town, and everywhere aroused the sympathies which trials and the spectacle of a great sacrifice naturally awaken in the mind of youth.

They knew that the orator beloved of the people, the orator of St. George's, already regarded as an envoy of God and the liberator of Italy, had himself given the veil to the two noble young ladies, and the latter benefited by the high reputation for sanctity which was associated with his personality.

There was soon a reaction in their favour at the Scefì Palace. In presence of the supernatural and of the undeniable intervention of Providence—thanks also, perhaps, to the mediation of the Bishop of Assisi—Ortolana suspected that the angel's prediction relative to Clare should be understood in a

wholly spiritual sense, and that her daughter was destined, like St. Francis, the great Umbrian reformer, to be led by a new light out of the beaten tracks. Favorino, who, after all, had only sinned through excessive affection, was likewise appeased. He forbade his daughters to be ever again molested, helped them munificently, mentioned them in his will, and slept the sleep of the just "a short time after the foundation of the new Order,"* says Thomas of Celano, without being more communicative. Monaldo, reconciled with his nieces, and miraculously cured by their prayers, became their most zealous defender, and commended the vocation of Sylvester, his grandson, enrolled in the ranks of the Minors. Paul, Favorino's other brother, likewise esteemed it an honour to count one of his grandsons, the Blessed Rufino, among the first companions of the Poverello.†

The storm once allayed, the two sisters, who felt that they were only in a harbour of refuge at S. Angelo di Panzo, appeared holily impatient to be off again, and reach the end of their journey. The Patriarch of Assisi, on his side, liked the promptness of their decision. Without more delay, then, he ascended the slopes of the Apennines, unfolded his plans to the Abbot of Monte Subazio, of whose goodwill he had already had experience, and foretold to him the marvellous destinies of the Order of the Poor Ladies, still *en germe*. The Abbot made him a purely free gift of the sanctuary and enclosure of St. Damian's, as he had previously done with the

* "In suæ conversionis initio" (*Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.).

† Loccatelli, Introduction, p. 35.

Portiuncula, so that the two monastic creations of St. Francis, the Poor Ladies as well as the Friars Minor, owed to the liberality of the sons of St. Benedict their first asylum and their first place of prayer.* The Umbrian reformer had all his wishes gratified.

Such were the beginnings of the Order of the Poor Ladies, such as they are reflected in the contemporary document upon which we are relying. They form not the least interesting episode of the Franciscan epic, and transport us into the midst of the Middle Ages. It is a regular drama, strange, impassioned, impregnated with the marvellous, and full of contrasts, then frequent, in which rights clashed—parental rights and the rights of God—and where heroic virtue jostled against the vulgarest instincts. The gentle and attractive figure of the Seraphic Patriarch dominates all, or rather that which directs and explains all these combats is the faith which animates the different personages. Faith! It shines through the crudeness of the social conditions, in the sincere reconciliation of parents and relations, and in the generosity with which, while moved to sobbing, they offer the two chosen victims that Eternal Love demands from their love. It shines with a still livelier lustre in the voluntary self-despoilments and self-immolations of these two noble girls, who turned aside from all the attractions of life to only long for those of Heaven.

* Loccatelli, c. iii. According to this generally well-informed author, St. Damian's was a dependency of the Abbey of Monte Subazio.

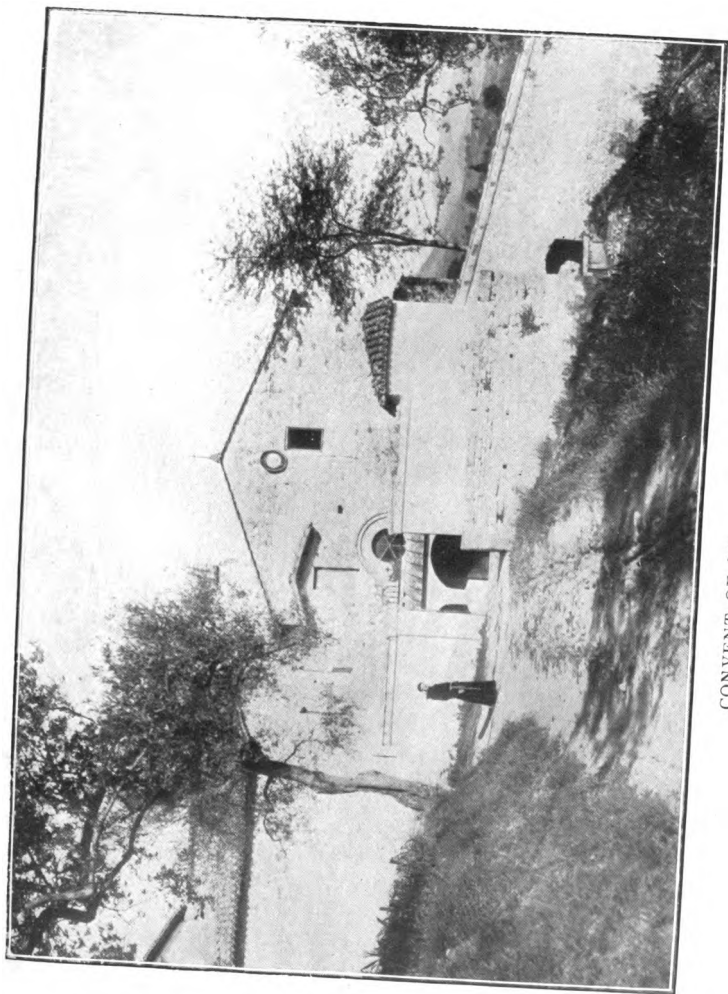
CHAPTER VII

FOUNDATION OF ST. DAMIAN'S (1212)

ST. DAMIAN'S is a hermitage situated a few minutes from Assisi, a little below the ramparts. One goes down to it by a pebbly path through a plantation of pale-leaved olives in the midst of odoriferous lavender and rosemary. The chapel, with its walls blackened by time, occupies a spot from which one discerns this earthly paradise of Umbria, where the blue sky is so pure and the earth so full of flowers.

This place charms us by the beauty of the landscape. It pleased the Patriarch of Assisi for a reason of a more elevated order. St. Damian's! That name sounded in his ears like an echo of heavenly harmonies, of favours the most precious, of Divine predictions the most unexpected—predictions of which the virgin Clare was not unaware. And hence her ardent desires. She longed for the refuge of St. Damian's as the mariner, buffeted by the tempest, longs for the haven which promises him repose. At last, after one or two months' waiting (end of April or beginning of May, 1212), "she reaches it, and casts anchor therein—that is to say, her whole soul,"* with the enthusiasm of her

* "Mentis anchorum figens" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. i.).



CONVENT OF SAN DAMIANO, ASSISI.

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eighteen years, her heart more full of sunshine than the Plain of Spoleto on the finest days of May. Her biographer, in recording their taking possession of it, cannot refrain from uttering an exclamation of tender admiration.

"Enter, O Clare, into this retreat, into this voluntary prison, which thou shalt not quit except to exchange it for the splendours of paradise. It is there thou shalt immolate thyself day and night for nearly half a century under the eyes of the Heavenly Spouse. It is there thou shalt beget to the seraphic life an innumerable phalanx of virgins, eager to walk in thy footsteps. It is there, in fine, that thou shalt break the alabaster vase of thy body, exhaling a perfume which shall make odorous the hillsides and valleys of Umbria."*

The installation took place without pomp and noise ; it was only signalized by the sanctity of the personages. Clare and her companions took possession of this dwelling by prayer. St. Francis, who directed everything, assigned them as Superioress the virgin Clare, and for Visitor that Friar Philip the Long, of whom it is said that in the Portiuncula an angel purified his lips with a burning coal. He did not retire without having exhorted them to persevere in the ways of renunciation, and promised them in return assistance and counsel in all their needs, spiritual and temporal.

It was very poor, this house of St. Damian's, and its first inhabitants very few—three or four Sisters ; a modest oratory ; narrow cells, in which hung a cross,

* "Hic ergastulum pro amore Sponsi. . . . Hic jacet virginum collegium . . . hic alabastrum " (*Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*).

their only ornament ; a little garden enclosed between high walls ; a terrace four paces long ! And from the elevation of this terrace the recluses could hardly have seen westward the chapel of the Portiuncula in the plain, still poorer and more insignificant. But there are compensations unsuspected by the eye of man. Stripped of everything, and weaned from earthly consolations, the Sisters possessed the real riches, those which are imperishable : self-forgetting abnegation, the love which embellishes everything, the spirit of sacrifice carried to its utmost limits, the sweet kindnesses of sisterly charity, and the wealth of peace—of that interior peace which nothing can replace, and which is the lot of pure and submissive hearts. There was no other emulation among them than that of fervour. They abandoned themselves with filial confidence to Providence, which feeds the birds of the air, and in the very midst of their privations were joyous, remembering the recommendation of the holy founder : “ God is the Sovereign Master, the Master by excellence. A melancholy and frowning face is out of place in His service.”* Nor was St. Damian’s “ a prison ” : it was “ a privileged corner of earth where one led an angelic life,”† “ a garden enamelled with flowers, a parterre which emitted a living perfume which was soon to attract a crowd of vocations.”‡ Is it not, in fact, written that “ solitude flourishes like the lily under the breath of grace ” ? The breath of grace, warm and vivifying, was passing over the cloister of St. Damian’s, and one saw, what seemed impossible,

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda S. Fr.*, p. iii., c. lxviii.

† *Ibid.*, *Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.

‡ Bull *Clara Claris* of Alexander IV.

the extraordinary religious movement which had marked the birth of the first Order of St. Francis reproducing itself. Clare and Agnes, too, exercised a kind of fascination over the minds of their fellow-countrywomen. Their holy and mortified life appeared to all like a living translation of the *Beati pauperes spiritu*, and reawakened faith in hearts. Young girls tore themselves away from the arms of their families to fly to the humble cloister, and among them were several whom Clare had loved in the world. Wives came to place themselves under her Rule, while their husbands embraced the Rule of the Friars Minor. Those who preserved sacred ties made amends by seriously restoring the reign of the Gospel in their homes, and religion thus, little by little, resumed an ascendancy of which it is never deprived with impunity.*

The influence of the Poor Ladies was not slow to reach the rest of Italy, France, Spain, the whole of Europe ; but it must not be forgotten it was from the humble chapel of St. Damian's the appeal went out for the reform of women's lives, as it was from Portiuncula that the renovation of the thirteenth century among men started.

On this account the convent of St. Damian's has a right to all our veneration. So it is a veritable reliquary, which time and the hand of man have respected. It is to-day nearly such as St. Francis built it, such as the filial piety of Clare has bequeathed it to us. Here is the garden which she watered with her own hands, the refectory where, with her companions, she broke the bread of poverty,

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.

the bell she rang for the exercises of the community, the sanctuary restored by the founder, the wrought-iron Communion grille, the choir with its rude stalls, the cells, and the infirmary. Here, in fine, is the cemetery, there the terrace with its view heavenward. Every nook bears witness in its own way ; every stone speaks of the superhuman energies of a soul capable, at eighteen, of shutting itself up in this voluntary prison. Blessed place ! place sanctified by prayer and by a thousand austerities witnessed only by the angels ! The pilgrim draws near, and kisses with emotion these bare, defaced walls, still redolent of the sweet perfume which the heroines of penitence have left there.

We know the habitation, the mother-house of the Order ; it is time to know the heroines themselves, above all the first elect ones, those who were to stamp upon the Order its distinctive features and its indelible mark. So at the birth of religious families, as at the birth of nations, there is an ideal, a sap, a force of expansion which we do not meet again in the lapse of time.

CHAPTER VIII

HER FIRST COMPANIONS

It is related of St. Bernard that at the time of his entrance into Cîteaux he had the happiness of drawing along with him, by the ascendancy of his eloquence and piety, his brothers and friends, thirty nobles, several of whom had at first earnestly opposed his projects of retreat. The life of St. Clare presents an analogous fact. The first subjects came to her from her own circle, and it was with a group of her childhood's friends, or of relations won over to her cause, that she carried out the plan of reformation traced by the genius of the Patriarch of Assisi.

The name of the Scefî stands at the head of the list of the nuns of St. Damian's. After the foundress, there are, at different times : her two younger sisters, Agnes and Beatrix—Agnes, her first and noblest conquest, a chosen soul honoured by St. Francis with a confidence which is her highest commendation ; Beatrix, who, still in the springtime of life, also bids farewell to the world's vanities, and solicits the honour of being admitted to the virgins' banquet ; Bona Guelfucci, or Sister Pacifica,* that aunt whose wise counsel guided her childhood, and favoured her

* We believe, with Loccatelli (l. ii., c. iv.), that Sister Pacifica was the name in religion of Bona Guelfucci.

vocation ; Amata, Balbina and Agnes Cornaro, daughters of Penenda, and consequently her nieces ; finally—a rare thing in monastic annals—her own mother, Ortolana, who, freed by widowhood, hastens to ask from our Saint a better guidance heavenward. A whole family of Saints flourishing under the same roof, and reflecting honour upon themselves by not yielding to the cry of flesh and blood, but only to the irresistible attraction of virtue !*

Good example is contagious. From the hillside of Assisi it soon extends to all Umbria, and beyond, and we then come across names the most diverse : Christina Suppi, Agnes Oportula, Benvenuta Diambra, and Philippa Ghisleri, of Assisi ; Francesca Capitaneo of Collemezzo ; Illuminata of Pisa ; Maria di Braye of Genoa ; Andrea of Ferrara ; Lucia of Rome ; Cecilia Gualtieri Cacciaguerra of Spello.† In 1238 St. Damian's counts fifty Sisters, as an official document of the epoch, reproduced by Wadding,‡ affirms.

In multiplying, the nuns do not lose their primitive characteristic—that something spontaneous, something chivalrous, which they inherit from the Seraphic Patriarch, and which it may surprise us to find in women, but which chastens and modifies that tinge of mysticism—sweet as the Umbrian sky—which envelopes Franciscan beginnings, and imparts an

* Loccatelli, l. ii., c. iv.

† Mariano of Florence, *Life of St. Clare*, c. iii. ; Wadding, *ad ann.* 1213.

‡ Wadding, *ad ann.* 1238. Cf. Loccatelli, l. ii., c. iv. Apropos of the sale of a vineyard which had been bequeathed to them by will, the names of fifty Sisters of St. Damian's, headed by that of Clare, are inserted at the end of the document in question.

incomparable charm to their characteristics. The mediæval chroniclers have well seized this double character, and, drawing inspiration from the very facts themselves, they have reproduced it in more or less vigorous touches in all the sketches they have left us. They are like two family features, of which we shall easily prove the existence in going through the San Damiano gallery of portraits, fixing our attention by preference on the first chosen ones.

Let us begin by noting Clare's two first disciples, Agnes Scefi and Pacifica Guelfucci, but without stopping there, for we have already had, and we shall again farther on have, an opportunity of appreciating, from the view-point which concerns us, the eminent and supernatural qualities of both.

In their train comes Amata Cornaro, daughter of Penenda and our Saint's niece, a charming young girl, endowed with all that pleases the world—beauty, nobility of birth, and graces of mind. She was on the eve of contracting a brilliant marriage, and the nuptial day was already fixed. Radiant and joyous, as one is at her age, she did not, however, regard the engagements and responsibilities of the future without a secret dread. To put her conscience at rest, she resolved to go down to St. Damian's, and ask the help of her aunt's prayers, whose reputation for sanctity was ever increasing. At the moment when she crossed the cloister threshold Clare was suddenly enlightened, and discovered in her niece the mystery of her real vocation. Amata Cornaro wept copiously: it was the voice of nature. Then, raising her head, she exclaimed: "Aunt, I am God's!" One may guess the anger of both

families at this news. The bridegroom talked of nothing less than burning the convent, and taking forcibly away her for whose affections Heaven was competing. Vain threats! The young girl remained inflexible, and soon all anger, all objections, gave way before a will so determined!*

Invested with the virgin veil, the new postulant had no other desires than to expiate her youthful frivolities, and thank God by ever-increasing fervour for the precious gift of her vocation. She had the happiness of spending the rest of her days in Clare's sanctifying company. We will meet her again at the foundress's death-bed; she will survive her for a few months, long enough to be able to bear testimony to the great example of virtue of which she was the fortunate witness.†

Alongside Sister Amata, who enters St. Damian's so young, is a still younger novice; she is almost a child, but a child predisposed by Heaven's blessings, one of those flowers of candour and piety who need the cloister to bloom at ease. She is called Agnes Oportula, and Wadding, as well as Mariano of Florence, calls her a native of Assisi.

Having come one day with her mother to visit the convent of the Poor Ladies, she clung so firmly to Clare's habit, and manifested such a desire to remain always in the company of the nuns, that her parents, not venturing to restrain her, entrusted the formation of her mind and heart to the care of the foundress; and she, simple as a dove, joyfully shut herself up in the holy sanctuary that attracted her. Historians of the Order relate of her an incident

* Loccatelli, l. ii., c. iv.

† *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

which at least evidences great courage. Having discovered one day by chance one of the Saint's hair-shirts, she coveted this instrument of penance as other young girls of her age covet a gold bracelet or a diamond ; she begged for its possession, and covered her shoulders with it. But she had presumed too much on her strength, and soon saw herself obliged to restore the terrible instrument, its sharp points having torn her flesh. She none the less tasted the happiness promised to those who from their childhood cheerfully bear the Lord's yoke, and was even more than once, as the same historians say, admitted to the delights of contemplation. One day, among others, while one of the disciples of St. Francis was preaching on the fruits of the Saviour's advent in souls, she felt enveloped with a supernatural light, and heard a Voice, which she knew well, murmur these words in her ears : " It is I ! I am in the midst of you ! " Vision of infinite sweetness ! " It is I ! " That syllable, dropped from Divine lips, had rejoiced and comforted the holy women of the Gospel ; it equally suffices to console the nuns of St. Damian's, indemnified in an instant for all their sacrifices and privations.*

To Sister Agnes Oportula in the portrait gallery of the Poor Ladies succeeds Sister Frances of Assisi. The latter was chiefly distinguished for her devotion to the glorious Patriarch whose name she bore. She strove particularly to reproduce his humility, patience, and spirit of prayer. Many times, the historians of the Order relate, our Lord, drawing aside the Eucharistic veils, deigned to reveal Himself

* Wadding, *ad ann.* 1214, and Loccatelli, l. ii., c. iv.

to her, and disclose some of the mysteries of the other life ; and it was on coming out of one of those ecstasies she uttered that exclamation, one of the most sublime that ever came from a Saint's heart : " Lord, you have wounded my heart with a wound which it does not wish to be healed."*

Finally, here is a figure by itself, veiled in mourning, furrowed by suffering, modest, and only seeking to efface itself. It is a widow, the very one whose sorrows we have just related—Ortolana, our Saint's mother, a late but very meritorious vocation, which had been foretold to her. One day, as she was gently reproaching her daughter for having left her, " Don't reproach me," replied Clare. " You will join us later on, and you will have the consolation of dying in your children's arms !" It is in fact what took place on the death of Don Favorino.†

Before that open grave, the châtelaine of Sasso-Rosso understood the nothingness of earthly felicities, even the most legitimate. Distracted with grief, she sought a refuge and a prop in her daughter, drew near to St. Francis, and was one of the first, it is believed, to be affiliated to the Third Order of Penance. Then, a little later, free to dispose of herself, and aspiring to a more perfect detachment, she begged the Patriarch of Assisi—he who a decade of years before had caused her to shed so many tears—to receive her among the Poor Ladies. The servant of God complied with her request, and then, without more delay, she sold all her personal property,

* Loccatelli, *loc. cit.*

† About 1214 or 1215. We have already said that Thomas of Celano (*Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.) does not precisely mention the year.

distributing the price to the poor ; confided Beatrix, her youngest daughter, to the care of Monaldo Scefì until she was old enough to share the happiness of her two elder sisters ; and came to place herself under the direction of her daughter, now her Superioress and model.*

Sublime reversal of the laws of nature, all to the advantage of her who submitted ! The old chroniclers are inexhaustible in their eulogies of Ortolana's spirit of humility and submission. They tell us of St. Francis and St. Clare sending her the sick and infirm to cure them ; but they do not tell us—and the human mind can hardly guess—all the greatness and generosity of soul comprised in such a complete renunciation of such a lofty position.

Clare's other companions are less known to us, but in studying their lives we shall be sure of finding in them the same qualities which we have admired in Sisters Amata, Ortolana, Agnes Oportula, and others—spontaneous vocations, generous sacrifices, an abundant outpouring of the grace and gifts of the Holy Ghost. There are as many heroines as there are names, and one understands how, with such elements, St. Francis and St. Clare ventured to undertake such great things.

* Loccatelli, l. ii., c. iv.

CHAPTER IX

THE ABBESS (1215)

ST. DAMIAN'S was no longer a desert ; it was beginning to be peopled with life and youth, and was vocal with harmonious chanting. Under the shadow of its restored chapel grew and blossomed, as in a garden, according to the graceful simile of two contemporaries, "the flowers that the hand of St. Francis had planted, and of those flowers the first and fairest and most odoriferous was the virgin Clare of Assisi"*—precious eulogies, which will make an impression on the reader's mind, when he shall learn that these two contemporaries are called Alexander IV. and Thomas of Celano—a great Pope and a learned historian—and that both had more than once the happiness of enjoying the Saint's conversation.

They were not content with strewing flowers on her tomb in passing ; they deemed her memory deserved something better, and they have sketched for us in delicate lines her moral features, designedly leaving in the shade those exterior advantages of which she herself made so little account.

Thomas of Celano depicts her such as he saw her

* " *Pretiosa plantula* " (*Vita S. Clare*, c. v., and the Bull *Clara Claris*).

for the first time—that is to say, just at the beginning of the foundation. “Oh, the enrapturing figure !” he exclaims. “Noble by birth ; nobler by gifts of grace ; virgin of angelic purity ; still young, but ripe before her time ; ardent in the service of God ; endowed with rare prudence ; of unbounded humility ; a pearl precious among all ; the cornerstone of the edifice of the Poor Ladies—adorned, in a word, with all the attractions that captivate the heart—Clare was one of those magnanimous souls we cannot worthily praise in human language.”*

Alexander IV. represents the Saint rather in the evening of her long career. “She was,” he tells us, “the ornament of the Valley of Spoleto, the Princess of the poor, the Duchess of the humble ; vigilant in the government of her convent ; a fervent promoter of discipline ; moderate in her corrections, loving rather to obey than to command ; discreet and prudent, amiable and gentle. Her life was a light, her example a sermon. Her feet touched the earth, but her heart was in Heaven, and her brow was resplendent with all the supernatural beauties which form the diadem of the elect.”†

What beautiful portraits, and how finely drawn ! One would say two antique cameos, the one representing the youth, the other the ripe age, of a beloved heroine. She is indeed a heroine, this daughter of the Scefì, but a Christian heroine, joining to all her other qualities an extreme modesty, which still further enhanced their value. “She

* *Vita Prima S. Fr.*, p. i., c. viii.

† *Bull Clara Claris.*

loved rather to obey than to command," remarks Alexander IV. Thomas of Celano is still more expressive. "She had wished," he declares, "always to obey, never to command; so it was only at the end of three years (1215), and at the formal injunction of St. Francis, that she consented to assume the title of Abbess."* She bowed her head through respect for the founder, and the Sisters rejoiced to see her invested with an official title, symbol of the plenitude of conventual jurisdiction—she who, in the eyes of all, was the centre of attraction, the soul and light of the new community.

One can conceive the distress of the elected on the one hand and the gladness of the Sisters on the other, when one thinks of the responsibilities which were at stake. No matter in what hands, an abbatial crosier is always heavy to carry. Emblem of power, it borrows something from each of the three authorities, the most august in this world, which it represents—the Father, the Mother, and the Church. So the holiest nuns only accept in trembling from the hands of the Bishop this insignia of their jurisdiction, even if their convent is among the oldest and most firmly established. What is it, then, when the title of Abbess is coupled with that of Foundress? Foundress!—that is to say, that she has everything to create, everything to organize, everything to defend. It is for her to mark out distinctly the object of the Rule, and to impress on her religious family the feature which shall distinguish it; for her to preside over the admission of subjects, to remove the unworthy, to

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.

stimulate indolent natures, to restrain indiscreet zeal, to provide for the present, to insure the future ; for her, also, to see that fervour does not diminish with the multiplication of convents.

And when called to discharge a function which required so much prudence and ripeness of judgment, Clare was only twenty-one ! So she counted little upon herself and her own lights, much upon the devoted concurrence of St. Francis, and still more upon the Divine assistance ; for it is written, "Obedience shall win the victory."

The founder's advice, which she had implored, was not wanting to her ; and we know that he traced for her in the following words the portrait of the Abbess : " She shall exercise authority with the firmness which the importance of her office requires, and the account she shall have to render at the tribunal of the Supreme Judge. She shall strive to be the first in virtue and sanctity, still more than in dignity, in order that her example may stimulate others to obey, less through fear than love. She shall console the Sisters in their sadness, and shall be their last refuge in their anguish and tribulations, being careful not to discourage them, for fear that, seeing no remedy for their malady, they should give way to despair."*

There is the Abbess such as the Patriarch of Assisi had her in mind, such as he has outlined her portrait in the Constitutions of the Poor Clares—the Abbess as the living witness of the Rule, the helper and supporter of weak souls, not employing the

* *Textus Originales, Rule of St. Clare*, c. iv., p. 57. Clare in her *Testament* reproduces the same thoughts (*Ibid.*, p. 279).

sceptre to smite except against insolent and obstinate arrogance. Clare will have this portrait constantly before her eyes, and what constitutes her merit is that she herself will become this ideal Abbess, who will at once be the attraction and despair of Superioresses tempted to imitate her.

Let us take her at the moment when the founder delivered into her hands the abbatial insignia. A thousand apprehensions haunted her mind: she was so young, so inexperienced, and the burden was so heavy! A single thought reassured her: she obeyed.

"She was one of those beautiful souls who are not self-conscious," says our old chronicler appropriately.* "Still young, it is true, but mature in advance of her age;" then so richly dowered by nature! Clear-sightedness in the conception of duty, indomitable energy in action, a practical sense of things, devotedness and infinite tenderness towards her companions, she possessed in an eminent degree the qualities which form foundresses of monastic Orders. Those qualities she displayed for forty years in the government of her Order and the spiritual formation of her disciples, without being wearied or disheartened; for she knew that in a religious community beginnings are everything, and contain *en germe* the glories or decadences of the future.

She began by an act which at once reveals to us the mystical character of her genius—an act of initiative to which Thomas of Celano gives prominence, as if he had wished to confound beforehand the theses of the Protestants on this point. It was

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima S. Fr.*, p. i., c. viii.

a question of giving a name to her religious family, and the choice of the distinctive denomination did not appear to her a matter of indifference. She wished that this name, as well as the habit, should be a sign, and interpret to all the fixed resolution she had come to, along with her companions, of extending to their sex the reform which St. Francis had proposed to men. The title of Poor Ladies pleased her, but she did not think it her duty to appropriate it of her own accord, and without the requisite authorization. She did not wish to be confounded with the false poor of the time—the Vaudois, Manicheans, Cathari, and other doctrinaires who dissembled under their flag an appeal to revolt. Besides, had she not learnt in the school of the Patriarch of Assisi “that in matters of faith and of the Religious Orders nothing stable can be accomplished without the agreement and participation of the Holy See” ?* For these various reasons she had recourse to Rome, and, unable to go there in person, as the Poverello had done, she addressed to the Supreme Head of Catholicity a petition, in which she conjured him to grant her the privilege of poverty with the title and habit that comported with that privilege.†

On reading this petition, Innocent III. could not refrain from uttering an exclamation of admiring astonishment. “Ah ! there is a privilege which has not yet been solicited from the Roman Curia.” And, deviating from the usages of the Roman Chancellery to reply by an unaccustomed favour to an unac-

* *Tres Socii*, c. xii.

† “Titulo paupertatis” (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.).

customed request, he seized a sheet of parchment and wrote with his own hand the first words of the Apostolic Brief which confirmed the privilege and the title holily ambitioned.*

Neither this spontaneous emotion nor this prompt condescension on the part of the august Pontiff should surprise us, for in all the lines of the petition he read a known name, a name full of hope—that of Francis.

He was drooping towards the tomb, and, seeing on the horizon in the sunny region of Umbria, at the extremity of the Patrimony of St. Peter, the unfolding of magnanimous virtues which announce the awakening of faith, he could not refrain from breaking forth into an expression of his joy.

Clare's petition has perished with time, but the privilege still subsists. As to the Apostolic Brief, it was at once a first sanction and an encouragement. There was no fear in a courageous soul like that of the Abbess of St. Damian's that it would remain a dead-letter. Very far from that ! It was deeply tinged with the spirit which animated her, and we are going to listen to an echo of the precepts and recommendations of the Pontifical Rescript in the conferences she addressed to her companions.

* "Titulo paupertatis" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.).

CHAPTER X

CONFERENCES

SOME of the conferences of St. Francis have been carefully collected and religiously preserved by his first companions. They form one of the treasures of mediæval literature. Unfortunately, it is not the same with the exhortations of his coadjutrix. They have all perished with time, except some fragments—a few detached maxims—which Thomas of Celano was able to gather, after the Saint's death, from the mouths of her survivors, and which he has inserted in his Chronicle. Let us not seek there for a body of doctrine : they are fiery arrows, salutary darts, which struck deep into the hearts of her hearers, and served as an incentive to reciprocally stimulate them to fervour. We here gather them together in a single sheaf, in order that, listening to the *conférencière*, the reader may form an idea for himself of the spirit which reigned at St. Damian's.

“Shut your ears to tumults without and vain clamours within,” said the pious Abbess to her companions. “Union with God is at this price, and it is only given to recollected and silent souls to penetrate into the sanctuary wherein the Most High dwells.

“ Efface from your memory all that is of the world and the flesh, all that would oppose an obstacle to the communications of grace.

“ Let reason rule the sensitive appetite. The soul which obeys the senses is a slave ; she who commands them is a queen.

“ Take care of the kind of snares which the Devil lays for you : the temptations of persons consecrated to God are other than those of worldlings.

“ Silence, manual labour, mortification, prayer—such is your invincible armour, your shield against the assaults of hell, the only means of overmastering the beast which each of us carries within her.

“ You cannot thank God too much for the great grace of your vocation.*

“ Apply yourselves, I beg you, to constantly guard this spirit of simplicity, humility, fervour, and poverty which our Father St. Francis strove to inculcate in us from the beginning, and thus you will shed around you the perfume of a good reputation. Love one another in the Lord, and let the love which burns within you manifest itself outwardly in your works. Your example will thus stimulate the Sisters to daily progress in the love of God and fraternal charity.”†

The great danger at St. Damian's, as in every cloistral life, was monotony. “ The very continuity of the exercises,” says a moralist, “ as soon as they are regulated and are performed for God, is very fatiguing.” “ What a pitiless ray of light thrown upon the infirmity of the human heart !”

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. iii. and v.

† *Testamen. S. Clare (Textus Originales, p. 278).*

exclaims, in this connection, the historian of the *Monks of the West*.* The nuns of St. Damian's were not safe from this infirmity. How to protect them against themselves, against the repugnances of nature?†

"*Sursum corda!* Raise your eyes, raise your hearts," responded Clare. "A glance at the crown the angels are weaving for you, and perseverance will become easy to you."‡

Such are the austere lessons the nuns of St. Damian's heard and knew how to relish. They are doubtless very elevated, and denote a rare and admirable rectitude of judgment in her who dictated them; but they only depict one of the aspects of her character—the severe side, almost terrifying in its rigidity. If we stopped there, we should have a very imperfect idea of the character of her genius and the nature of her relations with her companions. To know her completely we must go farther; we must search her correspondence, which brings to light a talent as rich as it is varied, as we shall have an opportunity of verifying later on; above all, we must open the treasury of her heart and reveal its wealth. It is what Thomas of Celano has done; and, thanks to him, we know her such as she revealed herself to her companions, such as she was in reality: the friend of discipline, but still more of her daughters—full of constant maternal solicitude for them; attentive to their sufferings, and only forgetful of herself; prompt to point out to them the trials of the way, but still more prompt to bring them succour, and, with exquisite tact, the expres-

* Montalembert.

† *Vita S. Clare*, c. v.

‡ *Ibid.*

sion of grace, finding for each of them the words which dispel the darkness of doubt, the word which delivers from the dread of despair, the word which revives drooping courage.”*

“Discouragement ! Who does not know that, for religious in particular, it is one of the most frequent, the most subtle, the most dangerous, temptations ? Clare was not unaware of it, and was watchful. Did she see a cloud on the face of one of her daughters, a cloud of sadness which is the ordinary prelude of great tempests, she at once went to her, took her aside, listened to her, wept, and, so to speak, identified herself with her. If necessary, she would prostrate herself at her knees, and not leave her until she was cured—that is to say, until she caused the ray of hope which enlightens and saves to shine again in her spirit.”† And all this naturally and without affectation, without perhaps suspecting that the art of arts is to form minds to be seekers of truth and consciences to the practice of good. She had not read learned philosophical dissertations thereon, but she had consulted two other books of surer and loftier doctrine—the Gospel, by the light of which she had discovered the value of the souls confided to her solicitude ; and her own heart, wherein she had found from the first, and without groping her way, what the most authoritative teachers declare to be the great secret of education—love, a love derived from the noblest sources, and proved by the most disinterested acts.

What courage she had to resume every morning yesterday’s task ! But, also, what a spirit of faith !

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. v.

† *Ibid.*

She compared herself, her biographer tells us, "to those lucky teachers that a powerful monarch honours with his confidence, and entrusts with the education of the Princesses of the blood." Only her Monarch was the Immortal King of Ages, and the "Princesses of the blood" whom she was teaching were destined to nothing less than to become the ornament of the heavenly Court. Could she ever make them too beautiful, too pure, too holy?

Nevertheless, while, as was fitting, being above all things careful to cultivate the superior qualities, she took care not to neglect the relatively secondary matters—the administration of the convent, relations with outsiders, and the nuns' health. On the last point she was particularly concerned. Most of her companions, such as Agnes and Beatrix, to mention only her sisters, were young, weak, and of delicate constitution. She watched over all because she loved them all, and did not fear to go into the minutest details, laying a warmer coverlet over their shoulders during the cold winter, and knowing, in case of fatigue or sickness, how to relax the rigours of discipline. She was only hard and inexorable to herself; but there she might have protested, after the example of St. Francis, that her functions of Foundress and Abbess imposed upon her the obligation of being a mirror to all her daughters—those of the future as well as those of the present.

A good tree can only produce good fruit, and a wise government happy results. The convent of St. Damian's had sweet experience of that. The gratitude of her companions, an intelligent grati-

tude, a blending of affection and veneration for her whom they regarded—and they were good judges—as the type Abbess, responded to Clare's lessons and self-devotedness. "They never tired of admiring in her the tenderness of a mother, the dignity of the Superioress, the sound direction of the mistress on spiritual questions, the brilliant virtues of the bride of Christ ;"* and, consequently, they were seized with a holy emulation, which increased their courage a hundredfold.

It was the golden age of the Franciscan family, for the Sisters as well as for the Friars. The Sermon on the Mount† had really become the law of their life, and heroism was the order of the day. Thus, what a rich efflorescence of virtues ! The old chronicler who serves as our guide has verified with his own eyes how serious, how fruitful, was the interior reform—the most important and most difficult of all—undertaken by the noble daughter of the Scefì. He describes for us, then, as an eye-witness—a moved witness, who does not try to hide his emotion—what he has seen and heard ; and what he has seen is beautiful like the Gospel, or, rather, it is the Gospel itself made sensible and living—the Gospel loved and practised literally even to heroism.

"There," he says, "on that formerly desert mountain-side, germinated and blossomed in the sunlight the most exquisite virtues : the love which adores ; the devotedness which immolates itself ; the spirit of prayer which touches the heart of God ;

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. v.

† Matt. v.

the patience which, serene and joyous, endures the hardest tribulations ; and, finally, modesty—that beautiful Christian modesty which is the index of a soul mistress of itself and of the lower appetites. All hearts were closely united, all wills tended to the same end. Detached from everything and from themselves, the Sisters had no attention and attraction except for imperishable goods. Cloistral silence was nowhere more punctiliously observed. A few nuns had almost lost the habit of speech, and when they had to communicate their thoughts, words were wanting to them. To make up for that, all cultivated a relationship with the Lord so intimate and familiar that they derived therefrom the lights and supernatural energies of which they had need.”*

A comforting spectacle ! and, we may add, a necessary spectacle ! At that time—an epoch of troubles, wars, and scandals, when society was tottering on its foundations—quacks and reformers were not wanting, no more than nowadays. They swarmed in the ranks of the Vaudois, the Cathari, the Albigenses ; uplifted their voices in the public places, and had continually in their mouths words of peace and fraternity ; but one discovered in their hearts unmitigated hatred, and in their hands incendiary torches. It was reform the wrong way ; it was necessary to oppose to it reform in the right way, and the latter noiselessly developed at Portiuncula and St. Damian’s, in the two institutions the outcome of the genius of the Patriarch of Assisi. “ Here and there,” resumes Thomas of Celano, “ at St. Damian’s, as well as at the Portiuncula, there

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima S. Fr.*, p. i., c. viii.

was only one heart and one soul, and one spoke only one tongue—that of love.”* Was not the old chronicler right? and is not love at all times the distinctive mark and unchangeable sign of virtue?

This sign, this mark, is found at St. Damian's. The pious Abbess was thus, without having ever coveted that glory, a true reformer in every sense of the word; and in reviving the marvels of the first ages of Christianity, she laboured efficaciously at a social or moral renovation. She also worked for it in other ways.

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, p. i., c. iii. and viii.

CHAPTER XI

ST. FRANCIS'S COADJUTRIX

"THE greatness of human actions is in proportion to the inspiration which gives them birth. Happy he who has within him a divinity, an ideal of beauty, and who is obedient to it—ideal of art, ideal of science, ideal of nationality, ideal of the Gospel virtues! They are the living sources of great thoughts and great actions!"*

Each of the Foundresses of Religious Orders has her ideal, the secret of her greatness, and each one finds it in the Gospel, the centre of all light. What, then, is that of "the heroine of penance"? Such is the question which naturally presents itself at the threshold of her conventual career. We have not to go far to seek the reply; it is the saint herself who is going to furnish us with it in one of the too rare pages of her private correspondence.

About 1240, at the time when the Order was flourishing and beginning to become widespread, she wrote to one of her spiritual daughters, not the least illustrious—the Blessed Agnes of Bohemia, whom we shall meet again farther on: "What a happiness to me to think that by your ardour in imitating Jesus in His poverty and humility you make up

* Pasteur, Discourse at the French Academy.

for what is wanting in us, and abundantly compensate for the imperfections of our zeal! . . . You have discovered the hidden treasure of which the Gospel speaks; you preserve it in faith, humility, and voluntary abnegation; you make it bear fruit in your hands, and you have thus become, according to the expression of the Apostle, the helper and co-worker of God in the sublime work of the redemption of souls and the uplifting of poor sinners.”*

There is the Poor Lady, the nun of St. Damian's, such as the Foundress herself defines her, such as from the start she understood her. The Poor Clare is, by the very fact of her vocation, “the helper and co-worker with Christ in the sublime work of the redemption of souls.”

This time we are fully face to face with the Franciscan idea; we hear the militant note which characterizes the monastic innovations of the Umbrian reformer, and we have a very distinct perception of the part freely accepted and joyfully embraced by his coadjutrix. She and her daughters will have their place—a definite place—in the eternal struggle of good against evil, and will participate in the joys as well as in the labours of the apostolate.

The Poor Lady will fight the good fight alongside the Friar Minor, the woman of prayer alongside the apostle, Moses in contact with Joshua—the one with the sword of the Divine Word, the other with the golden arrows of prayer. Both under the flag of poverty, Francis and Clare will both valiantly fall in the breach; but they are both assured that their respective mission will not end with

* *Acta S. C.*, March 6, third letter to the Blessed Agnes.

them.* Has not the Patriarch of Assisi received from on high the promise that the creations of his zeal will last to the end of time ?

We designedly insist on the motive which binds together the two institutions of the Seraphic Patriarch, because most authors neglect to give it prominence, and allow their attention to be absorbed by anecdotes or details of secondary importance. This motive is the idea of an apostolate, the thought which entered the heart of the Poverello at the word of the miraculous crucifix : “ *Vade et repara* : go, Francis, and repair My house, which is falling to ruin.” To restore the reign of the Gospel—such was the Saint’s providential mission, the work he was directed to accomplish. All the rest is only a means, and converges towards the same end, as the luminous rays towards their centre.

On this point we have a formal declaration of the Founder, valuable in this sense—that it throws light upon and confirms our thesis. At the moment of his death he blesses all those around him ; he blesses also the nuns of St. Damian’s ; he expressly recommends his disciples to continue the assistance which he himself has given them, and gives the key to his affection. “ It is because the Minors and the Poor Ladies, Portiuncula and St. Damian’s, are born of the same religious spirit,† which is the spirit of the apostolate.”‡

* Thomas Eccleston, coll. xiii., and Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda S. Fr.*, p. iii., c. xciv.

† “ Unum atque eundem spiritum dicens Fratres et Dominas illas de hoc sæculo eduxisse ” (Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda S. Fr.*, p. iii., c. cxxxii.).

‡ “ Sciens se ad hoc missum ut Deo animas lucraretur ” (*Ibid.*, *Vita Prima S. Fr.*, p. i., c. xiv.).

One need not hesitate to extend this expression to the third phalanx, which is the Third Order ; and then the Franciscan epopœia is unfolded to our gaze according to the rules of a strategy that one would say was borrowed from the conquerors of empires. The Portiuncula assembles the men, and battle is given ; St. Damian's then presents a battalion of virgins, who become the pendant and supplement of Portiuncula ; and, finally, the tertiary army rallies the seculars, and secures victory.

One cannot confound these three militias, as some authors have done, since they have three distinct Rules ; one can no more separate them, since they have a common origin.* All three proceed from the same idea, which is the idea of an apostolate ; recognize the same chief, who is St. Francis ; and inscribe the same device on their flag—the reign of Christ.

The reign of Christ ! There is their *raison d'être*. There, too—one cannot doubt it—is the ideal which captivated the heart of the daughter of the Scefi. See at last what explains for us the mystery of St. Damian's, the hidden life of those nuns, their holy enthusiasm, their dreadful macerations, their profound joy. They prayed, and knew that their prayers were not unassociated with the triumphs of truth. To keep them from slackening, Clare had only to remind them of the interpretation given by St. Francis to that verse of the Psalmist : *Venient cum exultatione portantes manipulos suos*. "Happy," said he to his Friars—"happy the preacher who is

* It is what Gregory IX. attests in one of his letters to the Blessed Agnes of Bohemia : *De Conditore* (Bullar. Francisc., t. 1, p. 241).

a harvest labourer in the Father's field, and converts souls by the evangelical simplicity of his manners, his tears, and his prayers ! He will be praised and rewarded by the Supreme Judge. But woe to him who makes no account of anything but learning, and at heart only seeks his own glory ! On the great day of revelation he will be despoiled of the fruits of his labours, and the sheaves of honour, which he unduly appropriated to himself, will be awarded to some poor Friar, unknown and self-ignoring, who shall have secretly gained those souls for God by the efficacy of his prayers and the edification of his good example."*

Was it a pious reverie, a mystical illusion, and was the Abbess going too far in applying those bold interpretations of the Poverello to a certain extent to her companions ? Who shall venture to say ? And do we not know that prayer enters into the plan of Providence ; that Moses, with uplifted hands on the mountain, supported Joshua fighting in the plain ; and that St. Teresa, from the seclusion of her cell, wrought numerous conversions ? It is not, then, rash to affirm that if the Patriarch of Assisi was the liberator of his age, Clare and her imitators have also contributed—in a measure which God alone knows, but which is certain—to a religious and social renovation which surpasses every human power.

Throughout the ages the same ideal always raises

* *Speculum Perfectionis*, c. lxxii. Cf. Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda S. Fr.*, c. c., and St. Bonaventure, *Leg. S. Fr.*, c. viii. "Expressions of this kind," adds the *Speculum*, "frequently dropped from the lips of St. Francis, particularly in the Chapters General" (*loc. cit.*). Clare could not, then, be unaware of them.

up the same vocations and the same self-devotedness. To have proof of it, it is enough to look around. The Poor Clare lives there, quite near us, in the heart of our great cities, of which she is the ornament ; and we see that she remains in the twentieth century what her predecessors were in the thirteenth—a co-operatrix in the apostolate, a contemplative vowed by her state and by love to the service of God, a combatant identified with the cause which she sustains. And this cause—we have named it—is the cause always at stake, the undying cause, the only one for which one sacrifices all, even liberty, even life : it is the cause of Christ. It is that which makes the Poor Clare and all contemplatives great ; it is that which encircles their brows with supernatural brightness, and communicates to them at critical times in history sometimes the triumphant boldness of the martyrs, at other times the virile energies of the confessors of the Faith.

We know the apostolic innovations and designs of St. Francis ; it will not be useless to examine more closely in what way his coadjutrix was called to participate therein.

CHAPTER XII

THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

THEY have discovered in the library at Ghent a document dated the year 1216, and very curious in its brevity, in this sense—that it presents in a new light the origin of the Second Order of St. Francis. It is a letter which comes down to us from Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of Saint-Jean d'Acre, a judicious and independent mind, very capable of affording us information on the facts he relates, since he was then passing through the Italian peninsula.*

After depicting the lamentable condition of Italy, particularly the city of Milan, "that den of heretics," he adds : " Alongside so many defections and scandals which sadden me, here is a sight which affords me consolation. It is given by men and women who have voluntarily stripped themselves of every earthly possession the better to serve God. The men are known by the name of Friars Minor. They are in favour with the Pope and Cardinals, profess an absolute contempt for temporal goods and all that is perishable, and have only one single

* He was born at Vitry-sur-Seine. He accompanied the Crusaders to the East, was present at the capture of Damietta, then returned to Europe in 1225, was four years after created Cardinal-Bishop of Frascati, and died in 1244.

care, one sole objective—the salvation of souls. In this respect they obtain results which are prodigious. Their life recalls that of the first Christians, of whom it is written that they had only one heart and one soul. In the daytime they preach in the towns and villages; at night they return to their hermitage and devote themselves to the exercises of prayer. The women dwell in hospices in the environs of cities, and live in common on the fruit of their labour, without pecuniary remuneration. They only complain of one solitary thing: it is being too much honoured by the people.”*

It is impossible to be mistaken; these virgins, pointed out as completing the apostolic action of the Friars Minor, are the spiritual daughters of St. Francis. Moreover, the author sufficiently designates them by their characteristic trait—horror of money. But what surprises us is the ministry of charity which he attributes to them, not as an exception, but rather as the general rule. He does so without circumlocution, and, without seeming to suspect that he is the only one to bring out this trait, he sets before us an almost undecipherable enigma.

How, in fact, is one to know what is the precise import of these expressions?—“The Sisters dwell in hospices, and live on the fruit of their labour.” Was there, then, an evolution in the mission of personal service proposed to the Poor

* “*Mulieres in diversis hospitiiis simul commorantur, nihil accipiunt, sed de manuum labore vivunt*” (Ghent Library, No. 554, and *Speculum Perfectionis*, Sabatier’s edition, p. 300).

Ladies? Were they originally *hospitalières*? And did they only become contemplatives and a mendicant Order at the end of a decade of years? These transformations are in the order of possibilities; but did they really take place? And in case of the affirmative, were they as radical as M. Paul Sabatier supposes? Pending criticism giving us the key to the enigma, let us be permitted, on the subject of the contemplative life, to hazard a few explanations. We shall deal with the question of seraphic poverty later on.

What the exact meaning of the word "hospice," used by Jacques de Vitry, is we do not know. Does it here retain its ordinary signification of charitable asylum, or does it not rather serve to designate the more modest residences which the Umbrian reformer preferred? What is no longer doubtful is that the Patriarch of Assisi loved to send to St. Damian's the infirm and leprous whom he met on his way, and that Clare, on her part, seeing in their livid wounds the image of the Divine Redeemer, received them with her great faith, healing simultaneously the ulcers of the body and the wounds of the heart, and often only sending those hapless ones away after having miraculously cured them.* What is not less certain is that the idea which gave birth to the Order of Poor Ladies—the salvation of souls—continuously remained the chief preoccupation of both. The rest, action or repose, care of the wretched, or intimate communication with the Most High, were subordinated to local events or needs, without "written rule, but not without

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. v.

direction ; for the Sisters, for their guidance, relied on the wisdom of the Founder and the prudence of the Abbess, the one devoting themselves to prayer and to chanting the Divine praises, the others, called servants—or, as we would say nowadays, lay-sisters—giving themselves up to extern work.*

We may go farther and say that the natural tendencies of the daughter of the Scefì inclined rather to the active than the contemplative life. Of a lively imagination and energetic character, she envied the happiness of the missionaries who were going out to Morocco or Palestine. These tendencies found free vent in 1220, when she learned the glorious end of the five martyrs of Morocco, St. Bernard and his companions, and heard the Founder exclaim, with holy enthusiasm : “ Now I can say with entire confidence that I have five true Friars Minor ! ” At these words, says Wadding,† she was thrilled with exultation. She, too, solicited the honour of fleeing with a group of her companions towards the African shores. Her presence there would not have been in vain ; she would have gone and sat beside the infidel housewife, and raised her from her abject state, or perhaps would have fallen under the scimitar of the Mussulmans.

Wishes which do not surprise us in a soul so greatly enamoured of the beauty of sacrifice ! Aspirations in which there is nothing but what is in conformity with the character given of her !

* “ *Famularum deforis servientium* ” (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clarae*, c. ii.).

† *Ad ann.* 1251 (extract from the Canonization Process). Also Mariano of Florence (*Saints of the Second Order*, chap. ii.).

This prolific thought, put into minds, will germinate and later on bear fruit. Later on, for the times were not yet ripe, and we nowhere read that St. Francis—he, the bold initiator, the daring apostle—tried to combat the thousand prejudices which then obstructed the realization of the apostolate of woman. To the nineteenth century was reserved the glory of giving birth to the admirable phalanx of virgin missionaries, Franciscan and others, and opening to them the gates of empires still seated in the shadow of death.

Clare had to be resigned. But to dream of the apostolate, to ambition martyrdom, and to see those two palms escape from her hands, was hard to a soul which felt ready to fly to the ends of the world to rekindle the flame of Divine love ; and we seem to hear the Seraphic Patriarch comfort her with a few of those brief, sweet phrases which are saturated with his spirit : “ Remain, O Clare, in thy mountains of Umbria, near the miraculous crucifix which spoke to me ! Remain there to pray, to weep, and immolate thyself in the sight of God ! Prayer is also an apostolate, penance has its value, and the virgin’s crown will shine equal to that of the martyr’s.”

The contemplative life, the life of prayer—such then (at least, dating from 1220) was the special vocation of Clare and her imitators. They will bear different names in history—Poor Ladies, Nuns of St. Damian’s, Damianites, then Poor Clares—but their feature will not change ; throughout the ages they will remain contemplatives. It will be their post of honour in the Church militant, and in the eyes of the Christian philosopher their best title to glory.

Contemplatives—that is to say, souls looking to God, and conversing with Him on the heights of Thabor, in the midst of light or darkness, ecstasies or dereliction, which human language cannot explain ; souls hidden in the recesses of the sanctuary ; souls exclusively vowed to the prayer which petitions and the penance that expiates—such are the Poor Clares of the first epoch and of all time. Their life soars so high above vulgar ambitions that they could not expect to be understood by all or always. In the Middle Ages they knew how to appreciate the grandeur of those voluntary immolations, but in our time, when all heads are earthward bent, who has preserved those views of faith and those thoughts of our fathers ? A debasing doctrine which permeates everywhere and misunderstands everything—free thought, that pest of modern times—arrogantly demands of us, “ What is the utility of these mystical associations ? ” “ What are these nuns doing behind their grilles ? ” clamour the pamphleteers of the sect. “ And why do they thus bury themselves alive between four walls as in a tomb ? ”

We shall not try to convert them : they would not listen to us. But we address ourselves to the people, to the simple-minded, to the lowly, whose minds they would fain pervert ; we address ourselves to all who admit the dogma of Providence—and who can reject it without falling into the darkness of atheism ?—and it is to them, because they sincerely seek the truth, we are going to justify—at least, summarily—the work, seven centuries old, of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CLOISTRAL LIFE

“WHAT are those nuns doing behind their grilles?” The answer is easy. They are performing there the office of Mary Magdalen at the feet of Jesus. Does not the Gospel say that they have chosen the better part, and that the rôle of Mary is superior to that of Martha? Every Christian, if he would take the trouble to reflect, would discover without difficulty in God Himself the *raison d'être* of the Contemplative Orders. Has not the Creator the right to reserve to Himself, like the rich ones of the world, a garden of which He shall be sole Master, and placing therein chosen creatures who shall make amends to Him for the forgetfulness and outrages of the multitude? If you interrogate Him respecting His works, ask Him, rather, why He has hidden in the invisible depths of the firmament stars more brilliant than the sun; why He has placed the fairest flowers in the desert, where they shed their perfumes and expand their brilliant corollæ far from human eyes; why the seraphs remain motionless nigh His throne, while He sends angels and arch-angels, messengers of an inferior hierarchy, to creatures. Like the stars, like the flowers, like the seraphs, contemplative virgins praise God night and

day. Is it not enough ? And who are you, then, children of men, wretched dust, to dare to put your interests and your glory on a level with the glory and interests of the Almighty ?

But let us beware of thinking that these nuns are useless to civil society. By their penitential lives, more angelic than human, they render it a service of the value and necessity of which the rising flood of crime makes us daily more conscious—the service of prayer and expiation. They make amends for prevarications, stop modern nations on the road to apostasy, appease the anger of God, and procure new graces from His mercy.

No doubt this efficacy of prayer and this redemptive virtue of voluntary mortification are not exclusively the portion of contemplatives. They are resultant from two universal principles—the reversion of the merits of the innocent in favour of the guilty, and the great Sacrifice of Calvary, of which they are the continuation and complement. They are the result also of the Divine promises which apply to every condition of life. But it is none the less true that they remain the privilege of pure souls, according to that expression of the Apostle St. James : “The continual prayer of the just man availeth much.”* When, therefore, the better to acquit themselves of this mediatorial office, the daughters of St. Clare shut themselves up in greater seclusion, must they not be blessed for it ? Should it not be feared that contact with a corrupt and corrupting world would soil their wings and nullify the value of their fasts and vigils ? And who does not

* Jas. v. 16.

feel that the solitude of their cloisters helps them to preserve a stainless virginity, advantageous to society? The people, often more enlightened than the pretended wise ones of the world, have instinctively seized this practical side of the question. When public calamities and scourges come, they know to whom to turn. They knock at the doors of the monks or spouses of Christ; they beg them to raise their pure hands to heaven to disarm the Divine wrath by their supplications, and their hopes revive!

"What o'clock is it?" asked King Philip Augustus, caught in mid-ocean in one of those squalls so frequent in Mediterranean waters. "Midnight." "God be blessed!" he replied. "We have nothing to fear, for it is the hour when our friends the monks of Citeaux are rising and going to pray for us."

True philosophers think like the people and like Kings. "I believe," writes one of the deepest thinkers of our time, Donoso Cortes—"I believe that those who are praying are doing more than those who are fighting, and that, if the world is going from bad to worse, it is because there are more battles than prayers. If we could penetrate the secrets of God and of history, I hold for certain that we should be filled with admiration at the sight of the prodigious effects of prayer even in human affairs. In order that society may be tranquil, there must be a certain equilibrium—which God alone knows—between prayers and actions. I believe that if there was a single hour of one day when the earth sent no prayer up to heaven, that day and that hour would be the last day and the

last hour of the world.”* And the learned Dom Pitra, studying the same social problem, does not fear to add that this counterpoise is absolutely necessary. “There is no medium,” he says, “between labour freely accepted or labour providentially inflicted, between voluntary servants or the necessary scourges of God. Thus, God only suspends annihilation and death, ready to fall upon the world, in so far as His hand is stayed by prayers ; so the humblest monk not only carries within the folds of his habit peace and war, but life and death.”

Although founded on the experience of ages, these principles are at present much forgotten, sometimes strangely misunderstood. It is well to call them to mind, particularly to-day,† when Religious Congregations are the target of the attacks of Freemasonry. It is well to repeat that the excesses of depravity require a counterpoise ; that, thanks to the monastic Orders, this counterpoise exists in the state of a permanent and wisely organized institution ; that this institution performs a public service equal to teaching or tending the sick ; and that this service is an immense benefit, purely gratuitous, and of a superior order. These truths are linked together. The day when people will appreciate them at their just value they will reject the ringleaders, *septembriseurs*, or iconoclasts, as their deadly enemies, and salvation will not be far off.

The life of St. Clare will bring its contingent of

* Works of Donoso Cortes, t. ii., p. 124.

† 1901. The author alludes to the French law of religious associations, a measure of legalized religious persecution, instigated by the fictitious Dreyfus agitation, got up as a pretext for renewed anticlerical oppression.—
TRANSLATOR.

proofs in support of our assertions, but before recording the facts, let us quote a page from one of our great orators, Monseigneur Bertrand, on the doctrinal thesis upon which we are dilating, a page sparkling with grace and freshness, verve and eloquence, so beautiful and so true that we cannot resist the desire of inserting it in our narrative. It will also be a treat to our readers, as it formerly was to Louis Veuillot, who culled it.

"I know," said the illustrious prelate—"I know that it is possible, that it is even easy, while remaining in the world, to ascend to heaven. I know the dignity of the commandments; nevertheless, they are commands. So the Church commands, urges, insists; if need be, it will use force (*compelle entrare*). But the field of the counsels is free. One enters therein in a transport, presents himself amid chants, acclamations, lights. However, the Church remains calm. It even assumes a severe tone. The Bishop calls upon one to speak the whole truth to him. 'Is it God that leads you? Are you worthy? Have you the will to persevere?' 'Yes, trusting in God's mercy!' And the Bishop in turn exclaims: '*Deo gratias*—thanks be to God!' And the chanting is resumed. 'Have you heard that child's strong voice? Have you heard?' 'I have seen,' she said, 'this palatial world, and its pomp has not dazzled me; I have seen this kingdom, I have seen its sceptre, its purple, its adornments, and I have despised them: *contempsi*.' 'And tell us, my child, why this contempt? why this disdain?' 'It is because Jesus Christ is the true King and Lord. To Him henceforth all my regards, all my

affection, all my faith, all my love: *quem vidi, quem amavi, in quem credidi, quem dilexi.*

“ ‘Give her, then, the vesture of the new man, the cincture of the strong, the robe of immortality. Put on her shoulders the yoke of Christ, sweet and light, and crown her brow with the veil. This veil, it was said of old, is the mitre of liberty, the sign of freedom, the helmet of salvation. Go thus adorned, thus armed, to your King.’ And now see that breast heaving, that heart overflowing with joy. Words escape from her lips, sweet and good words: *eruc-tavit cor meum verbum bonum.* She wishes to speak to the Master, to the King, and why? She has to tell Him of works, great things to say to Him: *dico ego opera mea Regi.* ‘And what are your works, my daughter? You are living apart, in the shade, useless. The active are elsewhere, the useful are in the world. The one will lead his flocks to pastures, and fill his stables; the other will furbish his sword; another will mount the rostrums of eloquence. But you, what will you be? Be at least the valiant woman. She has chosen the wool and flax; she gives spoils to her slaves, meats to her servants; she measures the field and buys it; she weaves stuffs and sells girdles to the Chananeans. But you, what are you doing, and where are you going?’ ‘I am going to Calvary. A secret harmony urges me thither, an echo calls me. I am running to Christ harmonious: *Christus musicus.* The lute is strung, the cords are stretched; nail them, fix them—living cords on a bleeding wood. Strike, strike, executioners! What a sound! what Divine harmony! They are first the seven words, then the bemoanings

of the Church, the voices of solitude, the songs of earth which mingle with the canticles of heaven. I have heard, I have seen, I have believed, I have loved ! And that is why I have chosen to be useless and forgotten in the house of my Lord Jesus Christ : *elegi abjecta esse in domo Domini mei Jesu Christi.*'

" 'No, you will not be useless, my daughter ; but you will be supplementary to the world, as one of your Fathers has said : *Orbis supplementum*. The world has great weaknesses, sin has made great breaches in it, evil has created gaps in it, and that is why the days are shortened, the nights have less repose, the rain falls in tempestuous torrents, and scourges make furrows. It is you who will supply for these weaknesses. Moreover, you are the completion of a creation, and through you the heavens will be more benign, the dew more fresh, the harvest more abundant. . . . '

" But I was forgetting that moral world which has much greater need that you should come to its assistance to supplement and complete it. It is there, above all, are the great weaknesses ; there are days without light, nights without sleep. See all those gaps. Don't forget any suffering ; forget neither the world nor the Church, neither pastors nor flocks. Dispense among all the treasure of your prayers."*

It is difficult to bring out better the secret influences of prayer, its part in the government of Providence, its Divine harmonies with the needs of humanity. St. Francis had had complete intuition

* Louis Veuillot, *Le Parfum de Rome*, p. 122.

of this mystery, one of the most touching, the most fruit-producing of the Gospel ; and that is why he instituted alongside an Order specially devoted to the apostolate a Congregation of virgin contemplatives, which was " the complement and supplement " of the first, a universal supplement, like the apostolic life itself. So the hermitage of St. Damian's in his eyes was not an isolated nunnery, but a hive from whence bees fled everywhere, active and diligent, to form new swarms and renew a world which was dying of selfishness. It is that movement of expansion, parallel with that of the Friars Minor, we are going to pass in review.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ACTIVE LIFE IN ITALY

SAN SEVERINO, in the March of Ancona, and Spello, in Umbria, which received the first contingents who came from Assisi, present a kind of anomaly which deserves to be pointed out. In both they are convents abandoning of their own motion the Rule of St. Benedict in order to be aggregated to the nascent Order of St. Clare.

The monastic transformation of San Severino is due to the zeal of St. Francis, to his prodigies, and perhaps still more to his heroic sanctity. While he was preaching in the chapel of the Benedictine nuns, a famous poet who had mingled with the crowd saw two fiery swords placed crosswise upon his breast. He was converted on the spot, and became, under the name of Friar Pacificus, one of the companions of the Poverello.* Moved spectators of such an unexpected change, struck with admiration of the Seraphic Patriarch, and informed of what was taking place at St. Damian's, they obtained from the Holy See the favour of submitting themselves to the more austere discipline which excited their holy jealousy.†

At Spello the Camaldulese nuns of the Vallegloria

* See the author's *Life of St. Francis*, c. ix., third edition.

† Loccatelli, l. iii., c. i.

followed their example, and the Umbrian Reformer, anxious to place over them a Superioress capable of inoculating them with the seraphic spirit, designated as Abbess Sister Balbina, niece of the Foundress.*

San Severino and Spello are the first-fruits. Next came some other Foundations, about which, in consequence of the trouble of wars and the disappearance of the local archives, we have nothing precise or very interesting. The only exception is that of Florence, famous in the annals of the Order. It takes us back to the most brilliant epoch of Franciscan history—to the famous Chapter of Mats (May 26, 1219). The Friars Minor were holding their meetings under the shadow of the Portiuncula chapel. A Cardinal, whose name will henceforward be associated with all the Founder's undertakings, presided. It was Ugolino, Bishop of Ostia, and Legate of the Holy See for Tuscany—an influential personage, whose high patronage and friendship the Patriarch of Assisi had recently gained. After approving the missionary plan of the Poverello and blessing the Brethren, he interested himself in the Sisters, and went to St. Damian's. He had several times visited the humble convent during his stay at Assisi, and was able to personally satisfy himself that the sanctity of the Poor Ladies surpassed all that was said in their praise. A document bearing his signature† leads us to conclude that it was in the course of these visits he opened a delicate negotiation with which he was officially entrusted in his

* Loccatelli, l. ii., c. iv., and *Bullarium Franciscanum*, t. i., p. 82.

† *Analecta Franciscana*, t. iii., p. 176, notes.

capacity as Pontifical Legate, and the object of which was this :

The Benedictine nuns of Florence solicited in turn for their convent of Monticelli the favour of being incorporated with the institute of the Damianites, and the Cardinal personally supported their petition. It was the third request of this kind. The Seraphic Patriarch consented thereto with the greater readiness, as he was aware of the complete success of the two previous experiments at San Severino and Spello. But who was to be sent ? The Saint's choice fell upon Agnes, the younger sister of the Foundress, and immediately, as was his wont, he notified both of the decision which concerned them.

He often repeated to them the words he addressed to his disciples : " Always hold yourselves in readiness to go where obedience shall send you." They were ready, and did not draw back from the sacrifice ; but they none the less felt all its bitterness, and the separation did not take place without painful heart-rendings.* As sisters, they loved each other tenderly ; as women, they wept ; as religious, they submitted, thus conforming once more to the manner of the Saints, whose merit is not to be insensible, but to conquer the weaknesses of sensibility.

Such a generous sacrifice drew down the blessings

* The foundation took place in 1219. It is shown by the two documents which are the groundwork of our narrative, a letter of Cardinal Ugolino on July 27, 1219, connecting Monticelli with St. Damian's, and a brief of Honorius III. of December 9 of the same year, confirming the privileges granted by the aforesaid Cardinal (see the *Analecta Franciscana*, t. iii., p. 176, and the *Bullarium Franciscanum*, brief *Sacrosancta Romana*, p. 3).

of Heaven on the mission of the Blessed Agnes. The Benedictines of Monticelli received their new Abbess as an Envoy of God, and complied with the requirements of the Constitutions of St. Damian's with a heartiness which in them denoted as great a spirit of faith as of abnegation.

Sister Agnes governed from 1219 to 1253 the convent of Monticelli, and solidly planted therein the spirit of recollection and of penance which reigned at St. Damian's. Beloved of God, esteemed by men, eclipsing her companions by the lustre of her virtues no less than by her dignity, she became the ornament of Tuscany, and was sincerely attached to Florence, "the city of flowers," her second home, but not without her thoughts often reverting to the places and persons who, so to speak, retained half of her soul.

All the first members of the Franciscan family are remarkable for their love of their native land, their Umbrian mountains. This instinctive sentiment, so pleasing and so powerful, nowhere shines more brightly than in the Abbess of Monticelli. She lived over the years of her youth again, again saw in spirit the cradle of her religious life, her sister Clare, the first chosen ones, that city of Assisi perched on the slopes of Monte Subazio, those majestic summits of the Apennines, and, feeling lonely, far from those enchanting places, wept over their remoteness. It is she herself who lets us into all these secrets in a letter elegantly written in Latin, and expressive of intense emotion, in which Montalembert recognized the tone of the letters that passed between the nuns of the Anglo-Saxon

Heptarchy. We give a translation of it as literal as possible :

“ To the very venerable, and by me loved as a Mother in Jesus Christ, Sister Clare, and all the community.

“ The humble Sister Agnes, the least disciple of Jesus Christ and thine, commends herself to thee, and, bowing down at thy feet with all submission and devotion, wishes thee all that is most appreciable in the sight of the Almighty King of kings.

“ Since all Nature was created by God, and it is seen that nothing can exist by itself in its own being, Divine Providence most prudently permits that when anyone thinks he has reached the height of prosperity, it is precisely then he finds himself plunged in misfortune. I say it to thee because I have realized it. Dearest Mother, what tribulation and sadness, unmeasured and endless, possess my body and soul, by which, in more ways than I can express, I am weighed down and tormented, for the sole reason that I find myself separated from thee and from my holy Sisters, when instead, it seemed to me, we were to live happily together until death. This grief does not leave me for a moment, but is continually increasing. It had a beginning, but it has no end, and is so continuous and familiar with me that it will not leave me. It appeared to me that I was joined for life and death with those who, unitedly along with me, consecrated themselves to Heaven, and that I would be buried along with them whom the same profession and one and the same reciprocal love gave me the right to call sisters. But, however, I find myself deluded, abandoned,

and extremely sorrowful. Oh, my holy Sisters, compassionate me and weep with me ! Mayest thou never feel such sorrow as I feel to be far from those dear ones to whom Jesus Christ joined me ! This cruel rending always afflicts me ; this fire is incessantly consuming my heart. Being so troubled in every way, I no longer know what to do or think. It remains for thee to help me with thy prayers, that the Lord may alleviate this anxiety by rendering it tolerable, oh, sweetest Sister and Mother, as long as I do not know if I shall ever be allowed to return to thee and my Sisters ! Oh, if I could declare the thoughts of my mind, how I would lay bare to thee my whole heart in this letter ! Oh, then thou wouldst see the keen and intense sorrow that afflicts me ! The soul burns interiorly ; it is devoured with a continual fire of love. The heart groans and sighs with the desire of thy presence, and the eyes are never satisfied with weeping ; and in the midst of this grief I find no consolation, although I seek it, but everything is changed into sorrow, the more so when I think if there is any way of seeing thee again. Under these distressing circumstances I am wholly consumed with sorrow, nor can I find any consolation in this life, unless some refreshment comes to me from the hands of Jesus Christ ; and again I beg thee all for love of me to return thanks to His Divine Majesty for this benefit which He has conferred upon me, that I should find in this house such concord, peace, and charity as I cannot describe, since these Sisters treat me with the greatest love and respect, and render me prompt obedience, all of whom commend them-

selves to Jesus Christ, to thee, my Sister, and to all the Sisters of thy monastery ; and I commend myself to thee and to them, that thou mayest pray for me, and be pleased to remember me and them, as a mother would remember her own daughters. Know, moreover, that they and I for all the time of our lives wish to completely observe thy holy precepts and counsels, and equally I make known to thee that the Supreme Pontiff concedes to me, in compliance with thy intention and mine, that we should have no possessions* of our own, as I petitioned him. Finally, use your influence with the Minister-General that he may often visit and console us in the Lord, whose grace be always in thy soul ! Amen."†

The affectionate remembrance of Agnes, the definite reunion of the nuns of Monticelli to the Order of the Poor Ladies, and the cordial understanding between both could not fail to touch the Foundress's heart. She sends them a messenger instructed to give them, as a pledge of her maternal affection, a few pious souvenirs—a phrase signed by her hand, and " the blessed veil which covered her head."‡ The Sisters respectfully kissed this garment, sanctified by contact with her virginal flesh, and after

* *De facto proprii*, and not *proprio*, as the annalist Wadding has written it in mistake.

† *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals*, apud *Analecta Franciscana*, t. iii., p. 175. All the annalists of the Order have reproduced this letter. It bears no date. Wadding ascribes it to the year 1221 (n. xx), and mentions the point of departure, Florence. These two accounts, the exactness of which we cannot check, have at least the character of likelihood.

‡ Bartholomew of Pisa, *Book of the Conformities*, p. ii., l. i., fr. viii.

the canonization of the Beata, deposited it among the sacred treasures of the convent. Mark of Lisbon, an author of the sixteenth century, affirms that in his time this relic was the object of public veneration.

Unfortunately, the letter which accompanied this packet has not come down to us, and we deeply regret it. A book has been written on kindness of heart in the Saints. Clare's reply added thereto a beautiful page, which will probably remain for a long time yet unpublished. In default of it, one may at least insert therein Agnes's letter. This document is "a voice of the soul," according to Montalembert's expression. It makes us understand a truth which we are too tempted to forget : it is that the Saints repudiate none of the legitimate affections. In them natural feelings are not stifled, but ennobled and purified by grace, refined by absence, and singularly perfected by conventual discipline. It is what constitutes their merit, and also the charm of religious history.

"For my part," writes Montalembert, "I listen to those heart cries, those voices of the soul along the lapse of ages, with a thousand times more interest than to the victories and conquests which have absorbed the attention of historians ; and I thank a thousand times those biographers of Saints and compilers of their works for having admitted into and enclosed in their folios, like flowers in a herbarium, these elementary traces of the heart of man and its conflicts."*

We, too, rejoice in having listened "to those heart cries" sent forth from a modest cell in Flor-

* *Monks of the West.*

ence ; but we are anxious to return to their author, the Tuscan exile, the virgin Agnes, and to learn the conclusion of this episode.

For more than thirty years, and without being able to open her mind to those about her, she will retain the inner wound this separation has made. Until 1253, until the hour of the last meeting in this world and the last leave-takings, she will suffer in silence from this malady which, after all, honours humanity—home-sickness. But let us fear naught. She will always show herself to be the worthy sister of Clare ; she will never hesitate between sentiment and duty ; and the old chronicles picture her to us as constantly engaged during this long exile in strengthening the work of Monticelli, in creating here and there new centres of prayer and penance—in fine, combating wherever she meets it renascent paganism.

The impulse has been given ; it will not cease. It seizes upon Umbria, Tuscany, the March of Ancona, and soon extends to all Italy. During even the Foundress's life Lucca, Siena, Perugia, Cremona, Milan, Venice, and twenty other less important cities,* contend for the honour of possessing within their walls some of her disciples. The nuns of S. Angelo di Panzo give up the Rule of St. Benedict to range themselves under her banner,† and Gregory IX. himself, wishful of having the Damianites near him in the Eternal City, gives up to them the Benedictine Abbey of St. Como in the Trastevere. Everywhere minds solicitous for a sincere reform of society turn towards them. The Italian peninsula admires them ; France awaits them.

* *Bullarium Franciscanum*, t. i. and ii.

† *Ibid.*, t. i., p. 258.

CHAPTER XV

PROGRESS OF THE ORDER

THE kingdom of the lilies was the first which appealed to the devotedness of the daughters of St. Clare, and in this kingdom Rheims, cradle of Christian France, was the first city which opened its gates to them. Their entrance into this city was recorded as an event in the archives of Champagne, and not without reason ; for it was like taking possession of the land of Gaul by the heroic phalanx of the Damianites, and on this account it deserves special mention.

In 1215 the Archbishop of Rheims, Albéric de Humbert, was going to the Council of the Lateran. Perhaps he already met on his way those apostles of the people and those virgins the very sight of whom, the year following, gave such great consolation to Jacques de Vitry. In any case, during his sojourn in Rome he had an opportunity of hearing Innocent III. himself publicly eulogize the new Order of Friars Minor. " He spoke directly to St. Francis, and begged him to provide his episcopal city with a convent of Damianites."* The Poverello, on his part, promised him—he who loved

* Marlot, *Hist. Rhemen.*, t. ii., l. iii., p. 503. Thomas of Celano is silent on the chapter of the Foundations.

France so much—to be the interpreter of his wishes to the virgin Clare.

The project was accepted in principle, and as soon as the development of the Congregation permitted its execution—that is to say, at the Chapter of Mats—the pious Abbess hastened to form the little group of nuns whom she destined for France. At their head she placed a woman of great distinction, Marie de Braye, a native of Genoa,* and gave them some souvenirs, as she did to the Sisters of Florence—a corporal worked by her hand, one of her veils, and the cord which she used as a cincture.† The blessing strengthened their courage, and her prayer was not without protecting them against the thousand perils of the road, amidst the Alpine glaciers, the cries of wild beasts, and the snares of highwaymen. Leaving Assisi in 1219, they reached Rheims without hindrance in 1220. Albéric was dead, and it was his successor, Guillaume de Joinville, who received them.

On the banks of the Vesle extended a cemetery, backed by the city ramparts, and belonging to the Canons Regular of Saint-Denys of Rheims. The Abbot of Saint-Denys kindly gave this ground to

* The epitaph of the Foundress of the Rheims Convent was still existing in the time of the historian Marlot (seventeenth century). It ran thus :

“ Here lies the venerable Sister Marie de Braye

Native of Lombardy ; of high lineage ;

Daughter of Lord Ocyer de Braye . . .

Left Genoa-on-sea ; gave the Rule of life to the house,

And died in the year of the Incarnation 1230.”

MARLOT, *Hist. Rhemen.*, loc. cit.

† “ The Poor Clares are still in possession of these relics,” wrote Marlot in 1679, “ and the faithful may venerate them at leisure ” (*Hist. Rhemen.*, loc. cit.).

the daughters of St. Clare, who built their modest cells, modelled on those of Assisi, and a chapel under the invocation of St. Damian. So they were first called the Poor Ladies of St. Damian, or Cordeliers, on account of the cord which they wore round their waists. Seventeen years afterwards (November, 1237), the Archbishop Henri de Braisne, at the solemn consecration of the chapel, availed himself of the occasion to change the invocation, and dedicated it to St. Elizabeth of Hungary, the glory of the Third Order of St. Francis. Meanwhile, Marie de Braye had given up her soul to God (1230). St. Clare left it to the General of the Minors, John Parenti, to nominate her successor. Sister Égidia of Porte-Valoise was elected, and our Saint sent her, as if to confirm her in her office, a portion of linen steeped in the blood of the stigmata of St. Francis.*

Such were the beginnings of the Foundation at Rheims. Under the third Superioress, Margaret Marcinus, events of considerable importance took place.

First was the death of St. Clare—a glorious death, which we shall have to relate later on, and which excited deep emotion all over Europe (1253). From that moment the veneration of the people of Rheims for the seraphic virgin was redoubled, and a large number of the most distinguished families, to have a stronger claim on their prayers, selected their chapel as their burial-place. There was the same growth of kindly feeling and same testimonies of confidence at Bordeaux, Beziers, Toulouse, Besançon, Montpellier, and wherever the Damianites were already established.

* Marlot, *Hist. Rhemen.*, *loc. cit.*

The second event relates to the Royal Foundation of Longchamps. St. Louis, equally, with St. Elizabeth of Hungary, the honour of the Third Order, as able a legislator as he was an intrepid knight on the battle-field, knew how to appreciate the social rôle of the Contemplative Orders. He regarded their convents as the best fortresses in his kingdom, and on that account had a great regard for the Poor Ladies of Rheims. So it was to them he addressed himself when his sister, the Blessed Isabelle of France, refusing the hand of Conrad, son and heir-presumptive of Frederick II., disclosed her intention of building a convent at Longchamps, at the gates of Paris, to bring thither the Poor Clares, and to be enclosed therein along with them.

Margaret Marcinus, deferring to the wishes of the monarch and of the Princess Isabelle, placed at their disposal three professed nuns and a novice of the Rheims house. The country and the names of these four nuns are known—very modest names, no doubt, and which were never heard under the domes of the Academy; and yet they are the names of heroines, since they were going to fulfil a mission which always requires uncommon courage—that of unfolding in the Isle of France, in presence of the wealth of the kingdom's capital, the banner of seraphic poverty. The leader of the little band was Isabella of Venice, the three others Odette, Etiennette, and Égidia, all from Rheims.*

She surrounded herself at Longchamps with recruits who came for the most part from the ranks of the higher aristocracy, and on June 23, 1259,

* Marlot, *Hist. Rhemen.*, t. ii., l. iii., p. 504.

twenty young girls there took the veil, in presence of the King, the Princess Isabelle, and the whole Court. Two years afterwards the Blessed Isabelle herself, free at last to follow her personal inclinations, shut herself up in that austere solitude, preferring the humility of the habit to the splendours of the Imperial throne, and thus teaching her contemporaries that all earthly gaieties and delights are effaced before the only happiness of this life, which is to love God and immolate oneself for Him.*

The Foundation of Longchamps opens a new era for the expansion of the Order of Poor Ladies. The grand example of abnegation given by the King's sister made a great impression. The convents of Poor Clares multiplied, radiating round the mother-house of Longchamps, their primitive centre and model; and at the end of half a century there was no large city in France that did not esteem it an honour to possess within its walls that "spiritual fortress," a house of Poor Clares.

Established in France since the year 1220, the Poor Ladies, during the very lifetime of the Foundress, penetrated gradually into other parts of Europe. We find them in 1233 in Spain with Sisters Agnes and Clare, the daughter and niece of Penenda Cornaro; the year following in Bohemia, where they progressed in peace under the auspices of Princess Agnes of Bohemia, herself become their Abbess; then in Germany at Trent, Ulm, and Salzburg; and towards the same time in Belgium, where a recluse named Ermentrude planted them.

All these Foundations are counterparts of each

* *Acta SS.*, August 31.

other. When one has read of those of France, one knows the history of all the others, and we shall not inflict on our readers the tediousness of thinking they are always recommencing the same page.

Besides, it is time to take up the study of the Rule, to give an historical sketch of it, to form an appreciation of its spirit, and to reply to questions which have already arisen twenty times in the course of the volume. What does the standard of seraphic poverty mean? Wherefore this struggle with those who formed their environment? What is there in it which can move modern generations?

CHAPTER XVI

AN UNPRECEDENTED STRUGGLE

THE Order of the Poor Ladies in its organization followed a progressive movement similar to and parallel with that of the Friars Minor, without ever being confounded with it. There was the same simplicity in its beginnings.

The guidance at the Portiuncula was reduced to a few sentences taken from the Gospel and connected together into something having the appearance of a Rule, which Innocent III. verbally approved in 1209. The novitiate was not more complicated. Whoever manifested to St. Francis the desire of practising along with him the counsels of the Gospel, whoever had made up his mind to live without receiving either silver or gold, having recourse at need to "the table of the Lord"—that is to say, to alms—and proved the sincerity of his intentions by distributing his possessions to the poor, was admitted without any other probation. These conditions once laid down and accepted, everything else was free and spontaneous, as events determined. The more simple the neophytes the better the Poverello loved them. He had no books about him but the Cross, the Gospel, and the Breviary "for the recitation of the Canonical Office."*

* *Rule of St. Francis*, c. iii.

He was himself the living model by which his disciples, learned or ignorant, regulated their own lives.

Things did not pass otherwise at St. Damian's. Clare's direction, the Founder's exhortations, and the love of God, were enough for everybody. The laws of the conventual life were engraven in their hearts before being written on parchment,* and in the same way were transferred from St. Damian's to the new Foundations.

There came a day, however, when, in view of the prompt diffusion and astonishing vitality of the Second Order, the Patriarch of Assisi felt the necessity of writing and codifying what had only existed as a tradition. A Rule was the only means of binding together all the communities "in the harmonious unity of fraternal and reciprocal affection."† without any injury to their autonomy. It was also the only means of determining in a precise manner the direction in which it was to move, of marking his new family with an indelible character, and fixing its place among the monastic bodies.

He had his plan well formed, and when they spoke to him of choosing between Rules already in force, those of St. Augustin or St. Benedict, "he confidently replied: 'No, no, that is not our vocation. Our way is the folly of the Cross.' "‡

In 1219, before leaving for the East, he unfolded his design to Cardinal Ugolino, Cardinal-Protector

* At first they had no written Rule, but a very short *formula vitæ* given them by St. Francis.

† Expressions of the Rule of 1224, c. x.

‡ *Life of Brother Giles*, by Father Leo (Quaracchi, 1901), p. 104.

of the Order, his counsellor and friend. He laid before him his programme, in which were conspicuous the three words poverty, prayer, and penance, and begged him, not only to draw up the desired Constitutions, but to directly undertake the government of the Poor Ladies, except the birthplace of their Institute. "I have only founded the convent of St. Damian," said he, "and have only committed myself to that. I shall there cause regular discipline to flourish, and shall provide for the Sisters' wants."* The Cardinal accepted.

In order to be in a better position to appreciate his work, let us acquire a little knowledge of this prince of the Church, one of the great personages of the epoch. He united in his person, affirms Muratori,† all the qualities which make great men: "learning, eloquence, and invincible firmness, which he always placed at the service of right and justice." Nothing more glorious to his memory could be said. To complete this panegyric, let us add that he was the friend and protector of all the saintly personalities who shed a lustre upon his time—Dominic de Guzman, Francis of Assisi, Anthony of Padua, and Raymond of Pennafort, to mention only a few of the more celebrated. The Foundress of the Poor Ladies formed part of this distinguished group, and we are assured by the Cardinal's own correspondence that he not only knew how to appreciate the Abbess's character, but that from their first acquaintance he conceived for her a profound veneration, mingled with affectionate admiration. He went so far as to write to her on the day after the interview of 1219.

* Wadding, *ad ann.* 1219. † *Script. rer. Ital.*, t. i., p. 575.

“ From the moment when the multiplicity of affairs compelled me, O my dearest Sister in Jesus Christ, to depart far from your holy monastery, and deprive myself of the consolations derived from your conversation and your devout entertainments, an insupportable melancholy took possession of my poor soul. I had scarcely set foot outside your convent when a deep and excessive sorrow transformed me, and, according as I withdrew, tears fell copiously from my eyes ; and if I had not hastened to seek at the feet of the Divine Redeemer the strength I needed, and which His goodness never denies to anyone, I should have become unfit for anything. Oh, where shall I ever find that ineffable joy which completely inundated me when, with you and my other Sisters, I celebrated the functions of holy Easter, and we engaged together in converse on the infinite love of our good Master in the august Sacrament of the Eucharist ? Poor me ! As on another occasion Jesus, separated from His dear disciples, and nailed to an infamous tree, fell into a deadly agony, so my spirit now is a prey to cruellest desolation. I well knew myself to be a great sinner ; I saw it clearly in view of your sublime virtues, the excellence of your merits, and the austerity of your Institute ; but now I am more sensible of having too much offended the Supreme Lord of all things, since I have not merited to have conversed longer with His beloved servants, and, drawn into the whirl of earthly concerns, I can no longer be edified by the spectacle of your holiness. Nevertheless, dearest Sister, those same virtues are what I derive confidence and courage from, since I

hope your pious tears and fervent prayers, which you offer for me in company with your daughters, will obtain for me that mercy which I need. On that account I place my soul in your hands and commend to you my spirit, that you may answer on the terrible day of the Last Judgment for as many times as you were not concerned for my salvation ; for I am thoroughly convinced that the Supreme Judge will grant you all you will ask of Him in the fervour of your sighs and with the abundance of your tears. The Pope, our lord, will go as soon as possible to Assisi, and I hope and desire to be able to accompany him. Salute on my behalf the beloved virgin Agnes, and all your other Sisters in Jesus Christ, and the peace and mercy of the Lord rest upon you.”*

Is this letter, in which such a lively sense of Clare's virtues is exhibited, suggestive enough ? And yet the judicious mind, the enlightened friend these lines denote, was near compromising, by belittling it, the Institute of the Poor Ladies. On coming to the delicate point, poverty, “the total rejection of all property held in common,” objections presented themselves, and he regarded them as stumbling-blocks. This absolute denudation, which his uncle, Innocent III., had not sanctioned, without finding it difficult to do so, when it concerned men, was it not too hard for women ? Would not the enthusiasm of the latter die out in time ? And even if it was maintained, was it not to be feared

* *Analecta Franciscana*, t. iii., p. 183. Cf. Wadding, *ad ann.* 1221. The allusion to the virgin Agnes proves that the date of the letter must be referred to the year 1219, before his departure for Florence.

that the charity of the faithful would grow cold, and that the Sisters would be exposed to dying of hunger ?

With such apprehensions, the views of the Seraphic Patriarch could only appear to him as a pious day-dream. To conform to the decree of the Fourth Council of Lateran on the Religious Orders, it was necessary to select a Rule already approved. He decided for that of St. Benedict, joining thereto certain distinctive precepts, and imposed it on all the convents subject to his jurisdiction. The severities of the Benedictine Rule were increased on certain points, notably fasting and silence, but the Community preserved the power to have possessions.*

Great was Clare's affliction at this separatist campaign. Not less bitter was the deception to the Founder on his return from Egypt. In Ugolino's Constitutions he found again prayer and penance in all their lustre ; but their sister, Poverty, she whom he named " his lady and his sovereign," only appeared there veiled in mourning. His idea had been misunderstood.

It is in these delicate conjectures we really recognize the liberator of the thirteenth century, the man of Providence, conscious of his mission and sparing nothing to make it successful. In place of recriminating, he prays long, and then goes to find Cardinal Ugolino. To his objections, which are none other than those of human prudence, he opposes the victorious refutations of the Sermon on the

* The Rule is inserted in the brief *Cum omnis vera* (*Bullar. Francisc.*, t. i., p. 263). The land belonged to the Holy See (*Ibid.*, *Litteræ tuæ*, p. 1).

Mount, convinces him of the excellence of evangelical poverty, and, after taking counsel with him, dictates that Rule of the Poor Ladies which is a masterpiece of monastic legislation.* It is, so to speak, a tracing of that of the Friars Minor, is equally composed of twelve chapters, enjoins the Sisters to always obey St. Francis and his successors, and bears the seal of the Poverello in that poverty, not only personal, but collective, to which he wishes to restrict the Second Order as well as the First.

The document is dated the year 1224. Immediately submitted to the ratification of the Apostolic See, the Rule came back to Assisi hallowed with a first sanction, the verbal approval of Honourious III., and became, in all truth, the golden charter of the recluses of St. Damian's.

It was a great day for St. Clare when she could hold in her hands those Constitutions bearing the stamp of genius and sanctity. She was none the less rejoiced on the day when she was informed of the enthusiastic adhesion of the Communities of the Order, which, from Spoleto to Florence, assembled round St. Damian's like daughters round their mother. Discussions had not ended, but she could at least rejoice, and she had a right to be elated—the standard of poverty was honoured.

Four years afterwards a renewed objection was raised by the same Cardinal Ugolino, who had ascended the Pontifical throne under the name of Gregory IX. Having come to Assisi on July 15, 1228, to promulgate the decree of the canonization of St. Francis, he did not forget the nuns of St.

* Wadding, *ad ann.* 1224.

Damian's, and wished to console them by his presence, thus testifying how sincerely devoted he was to them. In the course of conversation he broached the question of poverty, and urged the Abbess to accept at least some endowment which he liberally offered them. "Trying times are at hand," he said to them, "and your little convent will have much difficulty in maintaining itself." Clare, prostrate on her knees, begged him not to insist. "If it is your vows which stop you," he resumed, "I release you from them." "No, Holy Father," replied Clare. "Absolve me from my sins; but I have no desire to be dispensed from following as closely as possible in the footsteps of Jesus Christ."*

A beautiful and touching reply, in which the disciple of the Poverello is completely self-depicted in all the charming simplicity of her heart and the irresistible yearnings of her soul towards the ideal. There is not, perhaps, in religious history a more moving spectacle than that of this woman seeking "the privilege" of absolute renunciation as others seek riches, and resisting the offers of princes of the Church, and even the very majesty of the Roman Pontiffs, to preserve intact the treasure of Franciscan ideas. She will carry on the struggle for a quarter of a century, ever respectful, but ever unchangeable, sustaining unbendingly, after the disappearance of the Patriarch of Assisi, the brunt of the battle, aided by the Master's favourite friends, the Zelanti—John Parenti, Bernard of Quintavalle, Giles, Leo, and Juniper—opposed by

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.

Friar Elias and all the partisans of mitigation. She will struggle until she lies on her death-bed, when the Lord, as a supreme consolation, will bring about the occasion on which she will achieve a definite victory — an unprecedented struggle, a strange struggle, incomprehensible to those who do not admit that one may be impassioned for something else than glory or the pleasures of sense, but a grand struggle, rational and superlatively glorious, if it is borne in mind that the vital principle of the regeneration of the thirteenth century was at stake in these discussions.

CHAPTER XVII

PARTIAL VICTORY (1228)

WHILE opposing Franciscan innovation, Gregory IX. could not refrain from admiring the beauty of the spectacle which St. Damian's presented to his gaze. The fervour of the nuns, the singular gladness which beamed from their features, the miracles of Catholic charity in their lives—the beauty of such a sight moved him deeply. He truly felt he was in presence of a new outpouring of the Gospel spirit, destined, perhaps, to heal the ills caused by the Vaudois heresy. He promised not to trouble the Sisters any more on the subject of "their privilege," and gave his *viva voce* approval to the Constitutions—those of 1224—as they had been drawn up by the Seraphic Patriarch, and defended by the pious Abbess. But he refused to go farther, and would not commit the future by his signature or by the official rescript solicited by the heroine of penitence. With this half-concession he took leave of the religious of St. Damian's.

On his return to Perugia he did not forget them. Comprehending that an authentic document would be a source of strength to them, and at the same time a recompense, two months after the scene at Assisi—on September 17, 1228—he addressed to

them from Perugia a brief which, without imposing on them a precept, left them full freedom to obey the impulses of grace. The Poor Clares of Assisi treasure in their archives this Pontifical rescript, contemporaneous with their origin. It closes the first episode of the struggles undertaken in the name of the counsels of evangelical perfection, and on that account is a valuable gem, which deserves to be set in the history of "the Princess of the Poor."

*"Gregory, Bishop, Servant of the Servants
of God :*

"To our beloved daughters in Christ, Clare and the other handmaids of Christ, dwelling together at the Church of St. Damian, in the Diocese of Assisi, health and apostolic benediction.

"It is evident that the desire of consecrating yourselves to God alone has led you to abandon every desire for temporal things. Therefore, after having sold all your goods and having distributed the proceeds among the poor, you propose to have absolutely no possessions, in order to follow in all things the example of Him Who became poor, and Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Neither does the want of necessary things deter you from such a purpose, for the left arm of your Heavenly Spouse is under your head to sustain the infirmity of your body, which, according to the order of charity, you have subjected to the law of the spirit. Finally, He Who feeds the birds of the air, and Who gives the lilies of the field their raiment and their nourishment, will not leave you in want of

clothing or of food until He shall come Himself to minister to you in eternity, when the right hand of His consolation shall embrace you in the plenitude of the beatific vision. Since, therefore, you have asked it, We confirm by apostolic favour your resolution of the loftiest poverty, and by the authority of these present letters grant that you be not constrained by anyone to receive possessions. To none, therefore, be it allowed to infringe upon this page of our concession, or to oppose it with rash temerity.

"If anyone should presume to attempt this, let him know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of His blessed Apostles, Peter and Paul.

"Given at Perugia, on the fifteenth of the kalends of October, in the second year of our Pontificate."*

Gregory IX. returned for the last time to Assisi in 1235, to pray at the glorified tomb of St. Francis; but the chronicles make no mention of St. Clare on that occasion.

On the whole, the Pontiff's attitude towards her presents a mixture of sentiments in which resistance dominates. As a simple Cardinal, he refused to approve by writing of the Rule of 1224, and caused Honorius III. to be equally reserved. As Supreme Head of Christendom, he limitedly ratified—we would almost venture to say tolerated—as an exception, and only for some convents, "the privilege" of seraphic poverty.† Why this re-

* *Manifestum est*. See *Seraphicæ Legislationis, Textus Originales*, p. 97, and *Bullar. Francisc.*, t. i., p. 771.

† See the brief *Angelis gaudium* (*Bullar. Francisc.*, t. i., p. 242).

sistance ? A page from a modern author will help us to answer this question :

“ Charged with maintaining eternal laws,” a publicist whose loss we mourn has said, “ the Church has always known how to encourage and bless novelties. Each of its great Saints has caused surprise and astonishment in the world ; every great Religious Order has been the appearance of a new form of the Christian life. Novelty is always renascent in the old Church, and, although its dogmas are unchangeable, its spirit gives new life to everything, bringing to the dogmas themselves, which develop, an increase of precision and light. Individual initiative is continually active in this Church, so strongly disciplined ; and, although one Head governs all the members, even the humblest share in its actions. It crushes every revolt, but it receives every innovation, sufficiently tested. It is distrustful of private judgment, of personal sentiment, but it knows that the Spirit of God has diverse gifts ; it accepts their multiplied forms, *gratia Dei multiformis*, and recognizes that if the gifts of God are varied, varied also are human souls. human persons, the secondary causes that God associates with His government.”*

These principles are of all time. They explain for us the conduct of Innocent III., Honorius III., and Gregory IX., in presence of Franciscan innovations, as they explain for us the holy daring and filial submission of the Poverello, the unconquerable firmness of his coadjutrix, and her in-

* Ollé-Laprune, “ Les Sources de la Paix intellectuelle ” (*Le Correspondant*, June 25, 1891).

vincible attachment to the See of Peter. Francis and Clare were the two "secondary causes that God then associated with His government."

The conflict, then, was confined to the elevated sphere of doctrine, and by no means changed the reciprocal confidence established between Gregory IX. and the Abbess of St. Damian's. In political crises, and when the Bark of Peter was more violently buffeted by storms, the august Pontiff did not disdain to appeal to the devotedness of the Assisian heroine; for he knew, as Thomas of Celano observes, of what miracles love is capable among Saints, and how pleasing to God is the prayer of virgins.*

In 1228 he wrote to her :

"Blessed be the Lord God Omnipotent, to Whom you are consecrated as most humble hand-maids, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit benignly adopted you as His beloved daughters, and raised you to the high dignity of spouses of His only Son, pending His crowning you one day in the beatitude of paradise. Then, much more than others, you are bound to love and serve Jesus Christ with all the fervour and power of your souls; and He, on the other hand, Who is so generous to those who love Him, will make you heirs of His own glory and objects of His special predilection, so that nothing in the world can ever separate you from Him. Remember that you voluntarily followed the prompting of the Divine voice which called you to Him, and that you are imprisoned within these poor walls because you are loosed

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. iii.

from the world's chains and preserved from all the dangers of vanity, that you may be united in the pure and holy embrace of your Heavenly Spouse, whom you should prefer to every other, and run after the odour of His perfumes, until He introduces you into the eternal tabernacle, there to experience the effects of His Divine mercy. God grant that the remembrance of these great truths may be pondered on by each one with that attention which they merit, and which we expect from your zeal, that they may sweeten all the bitterness that must accompany your mortified lives, and change into delights all the pains that you endure for the love of Jesus Christ, Who underwent for us the ignominies and torments of the Cross.

“We must confess that in the midst of the innumerable cares of our Pontificate, and the anxieties that continually oppress our hearts, you are always our consolation and our joy. We must, then, pray you all and beg you, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also, if need be, command you, that, in virtue of this apostolic letter, you remember how much we have done for you. Continue to walk in that spiritual way we have pointed out to you ; live in a manner that does not savour of what is earthly ; labour to become more perfect, to daily forget the world, to desire still greater graces from Heaven, as the Apostle says ; and go rapidly from virtue to virtue. Acting in this manner, you will glorify the Lord by your conduct, and our joy will be unlimited, as we love you in God with our inmost souls as His beloved daughters—we might say as our ladies, since you are the most dear

spouses of Jesus Christ. Since we are, then, entirely convinced of your union with God, we conjure you to remember us in your prayers, and to continually raise your pure hands to the Lord, that He may have compassion on us amid the innumerable perils that surround our Pontificate, succour our weakness, and fortify us with His power, so that, having faithfully discharged the office entrusted to us, we may give to the Lord due praise, joy to the angels, obtain grace for ourselves, and the happiness of eternal life for all the children of Holy Church.”*

“The confidence of the Universal Pastor was not deceived,” pursues Thomas of Celano. “Clare prayed, and he felt comforted.”†

Clare prayed fervently, without any ulterior intention; and, unable to obtain from him, for “her privilege” and for her whole Order, the definite and immutable declaration she desired, awaited God’s hour in peace: for what she sought, above all, was only the triumph of the Gospel through the triumph of the Franciscan idea.

* Brief *Deus Pater* (*Bullar. Francisc.*, t. i., p. 37).

† *Vita S. Claræ*, c. iii.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FRANCISCAN IDEA

WE now possess the original of the Bull containing the Rule of the Poor Clares. It was discovered in Assisi in 1893, hidden in the folds of St. Clare's habit, and marked with the Pontifical seal, which guarantees its authenticity. Happy discovery! This parchment, concealed from all eyes for more than six centuries, and respected by the worms, is it not, in fact, a real reliquary, in which the Umbrian reformer and Pope Innocent IV. have in turn deposited golden syllables—syllables of saving efficacy? Let us open it out, then, with religious respect, and ask from it an echo of the heroic times of the Order.

The Pontifical rescript begins with this solemn declaration: "A petition has been presented to us in your name, begging us to sanction with our apostolic authority the form of life St. Francis has given you, and which you yourselves have spontaneously embraced. And we, doing justice to your pious desires, ratify by the present letter the Rule the faithful observance of which St. Francis has recommended orally and in writing. This Rule consists in this: to observe the Holy Gospel by living in obedience, poverty, and chastity."*

* Bull *Solet annuere* (*Textus Originiales*, p. 49).

Innocent IV. repeats thrice, to mark what a right this Rule has to our veneration, that it is the work of a Saint, of a truly extraordinary Saint ; and the Saint he names is the Patriarch of Assisi. We are, then, really in presence of the Constitution of 1224. Moreover, the precepts themselves, their original form, and the perfume they exhale, betray their author, as perfumes betray the presence of the violet hidden underneath the bushes.

The novel institution of a Cardinal-Protector, the suspension of fasting on the occasion of the Christmas solemnity, the exhortation to mildness in governing, and the most sincere concord in fraternal relations—these different clauses unquestionably come from the heart of the Umbrian reformer, all aglow with faith and love. But that is not the original side of his Rule. The capital point, the stamp of his genius, and the mark of his works, what placed him in opposition to his pious friend Cardinal Ugolino, is absolute, all-embracing poverty. He knows that his personal mission is to cause it to be held in honour throughout the world. To other Founders it behoves to bring out into relief obedience and the other Gospel counsels ; to him the virtue of poverty—it is his portion. So he wishes it to be the gem of the Poor Clares, as well as of the Friars Minor, and insists on several occasions on the importance and value of this virtue.

“Let the Sisters,” he says, “appropriate to themselves nothing—neither house, nor place, nor whatever it may be ; but, strangers here below, on pilgrimage to the heavenly fatherland, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them send with

confidence to beg alms. And let them be very careful not to be ashamed of it, but let them rather remember that the Lord became poor for our sakes in this world. Therein is the excellence of the most high poverty, which strips you of perishable goods, but elevates you in virtue, constitutes you heiresses of the Kingdom of Heaven, makes you queens, and leads you to the land of the living. Let it be your portion ; attach yourselves to it with all the powers of your being, and desire nothing else under the sun."*

Such was poverty in the sense of the Umbrian reformer. Poverty, the "widow of Christ,"† he espoused and chaunted ; poverty which he wished to oppose to the two excesses of his time and of all times—to the pauperism which blasphemes and hates, to the opulence which loses self-knowledge in the pleasures of this world. Cupidity—that blindness which shuts out from man the horizons of the Beyond, absorbs him in material preoccupations, and makes him the slave of a piece of gold or of an acre of earth, but always a slave—cupidity was, in his eyes, the source of all ills. Voluntary poverty, poverty lovingly embraced, is the remedy—a bitter medicine, but the fruits of which are sweet. It is not perfection, but it leads to it. It removes obstacles, frees one from servitude, allows the spirit to soar upward, and prepares it for the most sublime infusions of grace.‡

Such is what St. Francis had learnt in the school

* Rule of 1224, c. viii.

† Dante, *Paradiso*, canto xi.

‡ Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda S. Fr.*, p. ii., c. xi.-xxvii.

of the Son of God ; and such is what St. Clare teaches, in her turn, in the school of the Poverello. It is the philosophy of the Gospel, the only one that never fails. And this philosophy held sovereign sway at St. Damian's. "The Lord is my portion ; the Lord is my wealth. I want no other," she had firmly declared from the first hour of her vocation. "Go to the school of the Crib," she repeated to her companions. "The Saviour is our model ; His Crib our sweet nest of repose, His poverty our adornment." And, faithful to its teachings as well as to her own principles, on her father's death she would have her share of the inheritance sold by auction in the public square, and the proceeds entirely distributed to the poor.*

In front of the monastery of St. Damian they have engraven these words : "HÆC EST DOMUS PAUPERTATIS" (This is the House of Poverty). The Seraph of Assisi did better : he has engraven in ineffaceable characters, not on marble or bronze, but in the heart of Clare and her companions, the esteem and love of his darling virtue ; and the first stroke has been so deep that his spirit, which is a spirit of detachment from earthly things and filial trustfulness in Providence, has never for seven centuries ceased to animate that grand monastic body, the Order of Poor Clares. What a potent genius this legislator needed to create so enduring a work, and, on the other hand, what courage, what strength of mind, were required by his coadjutrix to adopt so resolutely the Franciscan idea,

* "Monili aureo . . . Christo pauperi conformari . . ." (*Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.).

and observe literally "without gloss" precepts so contrary to natural inclinations !*

This cult of poverty has attracted the attention of publicists preoccupied with problems of the social question. "Whence comes this strange passion?" they ask themselves. "And what profit does it bring to humanity?" What profit? The greatest, the most necessary of all—salvation!

A noble passion was enkindled one day in the heart of St. Francis, and then in the heart of St. Clare. They said to themselves: "Society is dying. Come, let us bend over it, and let us bring it back to life!" And they have made their voices resound from one end of the world to the other. When the son of Pietro Bernardone renounced his inheritance, when his coadjutrix caused her property to be sold in the public square at Assisi, they gave a grand lesson to feudalism, as well as to the people. They gave the great ones of the earth to understand that merit is attached neither to the purple nor to the sceptre, but to the complete fulfilment of duty. To the humble, to those who gain their bread by the sweat of their brow, they preached by their example courage under toil and resignation under difficulties. Take from the history of the Middle Ages the example of St. Francis and St.

* St. Teresa is pleased to relate in her autobiography how she was led to take the virgin of Assisi for her protectress and model. In 1551, at the time of the foundation of the Convent of St. Joseph at Avila, she had a vision. "On her feast day," she writes, "St. Clare appeared to me, all lustrous in beauty, encouraged me to pursue what I had begun, and said to me, 'I shall assist thee.'" Clare kept her promise; she assisted Teresa in the Carmelite reform.

Clare, their heroic self-despoilment, and what would it have come to ?

This social side of the mendicant Orders has not escaped the attention of a politician of our time. "The Church," he says, "is not content with relegating the poor man to the consolations of heaven ; it has itself been an indefatigable benefactress on earth. It has multiplied schools and hospitals, and there is no land upon which its apostles have set foot where there do not exist imperishable monuments of its solicitude. The Church has done still more. It is from her have come those fiery souls, devoured with the love of God, who, not satisfied with giving their alms, have given themselves, espousing poverty in order that it should appear less contemptible in the eyes of all, and less hard to those who endure it, thus solaced for what seems to them the most unendurable moral opprobrium. . . . What sublime acts and prophetic words," he adds, "has not this love of poverty inspired !"*

And the love of poverty itself, which inspired it, is it not the Gospel ? Let us cause the teaching of the Gospel to penetrate the governing classes, the financial and middle-class oligarchy, which is the feudalism of to-day, and among the working and agricultural classes, and there will no longer be any social question.

But let us quit the noisy arena of passions ; let us return to our two heroes and mingle in their conversation. In more familiar intercourse with them we shall have everything to gain, without

* Émile Ollivier, *Solutions Politiques*, p. 8.

having anything to dread. Too often the sounds of troubled or tragic amours related by romancists or poets offend our ears ! As we shall come in contact on our way with another sentiment, at once purer and deeper, let us stop, as the weary traveller on a long journey under a blazing sky stops and rests in the shade on the borders of a wood near a fresh, limpid spring.

CHAPTER XIX

FRANCIS AND CLARE

"THE history of peoples," says Montalembert, "is a great thing. Their revolutions, destinies, mission, glory, chastisements, their heroes, dynasties and battles—all that is grand, vast, and productive. But how vaster and still more productive is the history of souls!"* A thought as deep as it is brilliantly expressed! No, there is nothing comparable to the history of souls, whoever they may be, since it is the very history of human liberty; and in every life there is enacted a drama alongside which all others pale, a drama which will be echoed in eternity. But the interest increases with the beauty of souls and the lustre of their achievements; it is precisely this dual attraction which captivates us in the relations between the two heroes of penitence.

Francis and Clare, the master and the disciple, both Saints providentially brought together by the harmonious unity of their vocation, and equally spreading their names, not only over the hillside of Assisi, but over all Italy, over the whole world!

Clare declared that if there was anything good in her, she owed it, under God, to the counsels and

* *Monks of the West*, Introduction, seventh edition, p. xcvi.

example of the venerable Founder. Francis, on his part, had illimitable confidence in the prayers and merits of the Abbess of St. Damian's, and in difficult cases he sought the succour of her lights. It is what we note more than once in his life, and just at the beginning of the establishment of his Order.

"To save souls," he pondered, "is an excellent work—above all, a Divine work, since it was with this object the Son of God ascended the Cross. It is surely the vocation of my brethren, but is it really mine?" And he had doubts on this subject, personally feeling more drawn towards the contemplative than the active life. Not knowing what decision to come to, he assembled his religious, and said to them: "Brothers, I ask your advice on this question: Which of the two is better for me, to devote myself to prayer or to go and preach? It seems that prayer suits me best, for I am a simple man, and unskilled in the art of speaking, and I have received the gift of prayer more than that of speech. Prayer purifies our affections, unites us to the Sovereign Good, strengthens our will in virtue; by it we converse with God and the angels, and lead a life which is more that of heaven than of earth. Preaching, on the contrary, soils the feet of the spiritual man; it distracts, dissipates, and leads to laxity of discipline. Thus one is the source of graces, the other is the channel through which they are distributed. Nevertheless, there is a consideration of a higher order which makes me inclined for the apostolic life: it is the example of the Saviour of men, Who joined prayer to preaching. Since He is the Model we purposed to imitate, it

seems more conformable to the will of God that I should sacrifice my inclinations and my repose to go and work abroad." In order to obtain more ample light, he deputed two of his disciples to go to St. Clare and Friar Sylvester, then in retirement on the heights of Monte Subazio, to beg them to consult the Lord on this subject. When the two religious, Philip and Masseo, returned, Francis received them as God's ambassadors. He washed their feet, embraced them, and waited on them while they were at meat. Then, leading them into a neighbouring wood, he knelt before them, bare-headed, his arms crossed over his breast, and said : " Brothers, tell me what my Lord Jesus Christ commands me to do." " Father," said Masseo, " here is the answer of Sylvester and Clare—it is Heaven's response : ' Go and preach,' says the Lord ; for it is not only for thy salvation He has called thee : it is also for the salvation of thy brethren, and for their sakes He will put His words in thy mouth." At these words Francis, filled with the Spirit of God, arose, exclaiming : " Let us go in the Lord's Name !" And, full of holy enthusiasm, he immediately set out with two of his disciples, Masseo of Marignano and Angelo of Rieti, to preach God to every creature.*

It was not only for himself—it was for all who were dear to him—that he had recourse to the prayers of his pious coadjutrix. And who were dearer to him than his infirm brethren in the convent, or the sick lepers, and others who gathered

* Bonaventure, *Vita S. Fr.*, c. xii., and Bartholomew of Pisa, *Liber Conformitatum*, p. ii., l. i., fr. viii.

at Portiuncula, begging to be cured? "Go to St. Damian's," he said to them with charming simplicity—"go and find the virgin Clare. She has great influence with God; she will console you."* He thus notably acted in the case of one of his religious, a poor Friar, accidentally stricken with cerebral trouble, which made him unendurable to others. He sent him to St. Damian's. At the sight of the unfortunate invalid Clare was moved to compassion. She made the sign of the Cross over him, and, under her blessed hand, the cerebral trouble disappeared.†

There was thus a continual interchange of reciprocal confidence, good offices, and supernatural affection between Francis and Clare. St. Francis discloses to Clare the mystery of her vocation; St. Clare, in turn, enlightens and comforts Francis in those anxieties and troubles of conscience from which no mortal is exempt. The Abbess embroiders a fine linen alb for the Patriarch to wear at the altar on days of great solemnity; and the Poverello, on his part, composes for her the Office of the Passion, which she will learn by heart and daily recite.‡ Moreover, he reveals to her supernatural communications with which he has been favoured, those of a character to fortify her courage, and initiating her—doubtless one of the first—into the secrets of his marvellous vision relating to the Portiuncula indulgence,§ he announces to her the approaching revival of faith.

* "Infirmos plurimos trans mittebat Franciscus" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. v.).

† *Vita S. Clare*, c. iv.

‡ *Ibid.*

§ *Indulg. Portiuncul.*, ed. Paul Sabatier, p. 95.

The joys of the one are the joys of the other, and in trials they find a mutual support: never the least cloud, never the least disagreement. "In God, for God!"—such is their device.*

Guide and friend, Francis was at the same time Founder; and the Founder was, in the sequel, to prevail over the friend. In the beginning, and as Portiuncula and St. Damian's were near their birth-place, relations between the two communities were necessarily frequent. At St. Damian's everything was to be created, everything organized; and the servant of God often went up there, spending himself unstintingly for the good of souls, full of activity, always on the alert, like the gardener who devotes most care to the delicate plants entrusted to him. But when his religious family had grown, and the Institute of the Poor Ladies, following a movement parallel to that of the Minors, had overpassed the limits of the Valley of Spoleto, he distinctly traced the line of demarcation between both, declaring, in the most categorical terms, as we have seen, that he only reserved to himself St. Damian's, and placed all the other houses of the Second Order under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the Cardinal-Protector. And even with St. Damian's he observed a circumspection for which he cannot be reproached. Careful of safeguarding the conduct of his brethren, as well as his own, from all suspicion, he forbade them to go there without a formal authorization; "and for a simple infraction of this limitation he condemned one of his religious to traverse several

* "Perfecte diligam" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda* S. Fr., p. iii., c. cxxxii.).

miles, half-clad, in the depth of winter, through frost and snow.”* The punishment was severe: was it too much? The world is so perverse, and poor humanity so weak!

The Saint himself, moreover, gave an example of extreme prudence. His visits to St. Damian’s gradually took place at longer intervals. “They were rare, always useful, always grounded on necessity,”† says in this connection his first biographer; and we may add this word of explanation: always based on motives of justice and charity, such as the drawing up of the Rule, spiritual direction, or preaching.

This attitude of reserve excluded neither the affection of the father nor the sincere attachment of the friend, but it painfully affected the poor recluses. They complained of being abandoned: their Institute was still so young, the Sisters so inexperienced, and needing so much firm and safe direction, in which no one could replace the Founder. To the Friars who communicated their grievances the servant of God contented himself with replying: “Don’t think that I do not love them with entire and perfect affection, or that I forget them. No! We could not in the beginning fail to be concerned in the affair of their vocation, but to abandon them now, after the share we have had in their settlement, would be an unpardonable unkindness. Only,” he added, “I owe you the example of prudence.”‡

Days passed; complaints became more pressing,

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda S. Fr.*, p. iii., c. cxxxiv.

† *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

‡ “Non credatis, charissimi, quod eas perfecte non diligam” (*ibid.*, p. iii., c. cxxxii.).

but always led to nothing. At last the intervention and repeated solicitations of Friar Elias ended in deciding the Seraphic Patriarch to quit his reserve, to which we owe an object-lesson and a promise quite mediæval in flavour and thoroughly to the taste of the Poverello.

It is the historian of the Order, Thomas of Celano, who has handed down to us the object-lesson. "Yielding to the entreaties of Friar Elias," he says, "St. Francis finally repaired to the monastery of St. Damian. The Sisters, apprised, run to the chapel and take their places in the choir, panting with joy, awaiting one of those fervent and weighty addresses which were their delight. But the Saint, in place of speaking, gives them one of those silent sermons which he affected, and which he had the gift of making impressive. He covers his head with ashes, with which he strews the floor of the sanctuary, and then hurriedly retires, reciting the Psalm *Miserere*. This symbolical language deeply moved the pious recluses. They understood that they were not to esteem themselves more than ashes, and that only at this price would they have a right to the affection of their Founder, and merit the blessings of the Heavenly Spouse."*

After the object-lesson which speaks to the spirit, here is the letter which speaks to the heart. It bears no date, but one may regard it as the logical sequence and complement of the Poverello's silent sermon. "Since, obedient to the impulse of grace," he writes to Clare and her companions,

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda S. Fr.*, p. iii., c. cxxxiv.

"you willed to constitute yourselves servants of the King of kings, and consecrate yourselves to His service, living according to the perfection of the Holy Gospel, I promise you, on my part, to have for you always, myself or my brethren, an attentive care and very special solicitude, as for my Friars themselves."* It is the letter of a Founder, the letter of a Saint, doubly worthy on that account, despite its brevity, of all our veneration. It is a precious pearl, a relic which the Abbess of St. Damian's carefully preserved. After the death of the Seraphic Patriarch, she inserted it in the Rule of 1224, and when she herself, a quarter of a century later, on the threshold of eternity, dictated her will, she relied on this authentic document, on this undeniable promise, to commend for ever her daughters to the vigilance of the successors of St. Francis. She did better still : she assimilated so thoroughly the lessons, counsels, and virtues of the humble mendicant of Assisi that posterity, unable to separate them, will identify them in a single phrase : "Two seraphic souls."

Two seraphic souls ! But what means this expression, which has already occurred a hundred times in the course of this narrative, without our stopping to consider it ? It would not, perhaps, be useless to precisely indicate its meaning, the more so as under the surface of the letter are hidden spiritual beauties which the eye of the passing man cannot see, but of which his faith is dimly conscious.

* *Rule of St. Clare*, c. vi. (*Textus Originales*, p. 62). Thomas of Celano alludes to this promise, without reproducing the letter.

The seraphs are at the head of the angelic hierarchies. The seraph, St. Thomas tells us, is a living flame, a fire of love. The cherub is light, the seraph love, and it is love which is nearer to God—on high the love that possesses and adores, below the love that desires and immolates itself. It is under this second aspect that the piety of the Patriarch of Assisi and his coadjutrix presents itself to us. Their heart is a furnace whence flames, uninterruptedly burning, ascend to the throne of the Eternal.

One may indifferently apply to the master or disciple what Thomas of Celano has only said of the master: "To God all their time! to God all their affections!"*

On both sides there is the same disinterestedness, the same self-forgetfulness, the same zeal for the salvation of souls, the same spirit of sacrifice carried even to heroism—in a word, the same inspiring breath: Divine love—"that love which lightens all crosses, and sings in the midst of all sufferings!"† No doubt Francis alone has been honoured with the vision of the seraph on Monte Vernia; he alone has received in his virginal flesh the impression of the sacred stigmata of the Passion; but the recluse of St. Damian's, a pure victim and voluntary captive for forty years, was she not also a martyr of love?‡

* "Totum cordis, totum temporis" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda S. Fr.*, p. iii., c. xxxviii.).

† "Flagella corporis levigat amor cordis" (*Vita S. Clare*, c. iii.).

‡ "The life of a religious in strict conformity to the precepts of his Rule is a kind of unbloody martyrdom" (Cardinal Bona). "Martyrdom is the more excellent which is longest and which must last all our life" (St. Francis of Sales).

If we were asked, What is the characteristic of both, we should declare that meekness seems to dominate in St. Francis and strength in St. Clare. But if we were questioned as to their point of resemblance, we should unhesitatingly reply: "It is love descended from the heights of Monte Vernia—seraphic love." Seraphic is the Patriarch of the Minors, seraphic the Virgin of Assisi; seraphic also is their mutual and quite heavenly friendship. Purer than the snow, more ardent than the sun's ray, it remains the perfect image of those transfigured affections of which Martha and Mary Magdalen are the models. The most prejudiced mind finds therein nothing to censure, and as to the true Christian—ah, how happy he feels to thus meet in history, "amid those floods of guilty love which corrupt the world, some drops, at least of that chaste love that man has lost with innocence, that we shall discover one day in heaven, and of which we can already, in the lives of the Saints, sometimes breathe beforehand the virginal perfume!"*

We are going to inhale this virginal and delightful perfume in a scene dramatized by the author of the *Fioretti*, and which might be entitled, "A Saint's Meal." It is a worthy pendant of the leave-takings of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica.

* Mgr. Bougaud, *Hist. de St. Chantal*, t. i., p. 249.

CHAPTER XX

FAREWELLS

THE Abbess of St. Damian's had several times manifested to the holy Founder a desire, which seems to us quite natural, of revisiting the Portiuncula, there spending a day in his company and sharing his frugal meal ; but she always met with a refusal. The religious of Our Lady of Angels, having learnt the subject of her request, could not refrain from pleading her cause, and said to their blessed Father : " Father, this rigidity seems to us not in accordance with Divine charity, that thou shouldst not hearken in such a small matter as eating with thee to Sister Clare, a virgin so holy and beloved of God, and especially considering that through thy preaching she abandoned the riches and pomp of the world. And truly, if she asked of thee a greater favour than this, thou oughtest to do it for this thy spiritual plant." Then St. Francis replied : " Does it seem to you that I ought to consent ?" His companions answered : " Yes, Father ; it is a suitable thing that thou shouldst grant her this favour and consolation." Then said St. Francis : " Since it seems so to you, it seems so to me also ; but that she may be more consoled, I wish that this meal should be at St. Mary of Angels,

because she has been so long secluded in St. Damian's that she will rejoice to see the place of Holy Mary, where she was received* and made the spouse of Jesus Christ, and there we shall eat together in the Name of God."

The day appointed having come, St. Clare left her monastery with one of her Sisters, accompanied by some companions of St. Francis, and went to St. Mary of the Angels. Having devoutly saluted the Virgin Mary before her altar, where she had had her hair cut off and received the veil, she was led into the house until the dinner-hour. Meanwhile St. Francis had the table laid on the bare ground, as they were wont to do, and the hour for dining having come, they sat down together, St. Francis and St. Clare and one of the companions of St. Francis with St. Clare's companion, and then all the other companions, humbly seating themselves at table. At the first serving St. Francis began to speak of God so sweetly, so loftily, so marvellously that, abundance of Divine grace descending upon them, they were all rapt in God. And remaining thus in ecstasy, with their eyes and hands raised to heaven, the men of Assisi and Bettona and the country round about saw St. Mary of the Angels and the whole place and the wood that then led to the place burning brightly, it seeming that a great fire enveloped the church and the place and the wood together. The Assisians, on that account, ran thither in great haste to extinguish the fire,

* "Tonduta" is the expression used by the author of the *Fioretti*—that is, had her head shorn of its locks of hair after renouncing the world and worldly possessions.—
TRANSLATOR.

really believing that everything was burning. But when they came to the place and found nothing on fire, they went within, and found St. Francis, with St. Clare and all their companions, rapt in God through contemplation, and seated around that humble table. Wherefore they understood with certainty that it was a Divine and not a material fire which God had caused to miraculously appear, to demonstrate and signify the fire of Divine love which burned in the souls of those holy friars and holy nuns, whereupon they departed with great consolation in their hearts and holy edification. Then, after a long space of time, St. Francis and St. Clare, and all the others together, returning to themselves, and feeling much comforted by the heavenly nourishment, cared very little for corporal food. And so, the blessed meal having ended, St. Clare, well escorted, returned to St. Damian's, where the Sisters, seeing her, had great joy; for they feared lest St. Francis might have sent her to govern some other monastery, as he had already sent Sister Agnes, her holy sister, to rule as Abbess the monastery of Monticelli in Florence, and since St. Francis had one time said to St. Clare: "Be ready, in case I should have need to send thee to another place"; and she, as a daughter of holy obedience, replied: "Father, I am always ready, wherever you will send me." Wherefore the Sisters greatly rejoiced when they saw her again, and St. Clare derived from this also great consolation.*

* *Fioretti*, c. xv. The *Fioretti* is the source whence Bartholomew of Pisa and subsequent writers have taken this incident.

A charming legend, it must be confessed ! And yet the reality is poetry of a still higher flight, for the reality is love in its perfection, love capable of self-conquest, love hungering for self-immolation and preferring the sacrifices of Calvary to the delights of Thabor.

Let us reflect, for we are drawing nigh at once to the summits of the mystical life and the last interview of the two seraphs of Assisi.

It is known that St. Francis was not only Founder of a Religious Order, but also an apostle, one of the greatest and most intrepid. He dreamt of nothing less than the conquest of the world, to restore it to Him Who redeemed it at the price of His blood ;* and he was ready, to this end, to go to the extremities of the globe, ready to give his life. He even wished it, and it will be remembered with what intrepidity, being at the siege of Damietta (1219), he presented himself before the head of the Mohammedans, the Sultan of Cairo, and said to him : " If you are wavering between the Christian law and the law of Mahomet, cause a great fire to be enkindled ; I shall enter therein with your *imans*,† and if I come out safe and sound from the flames, you will recognize by that sign that Christ alone merits adoration." The Sultan dared not accept, fearing a popular rising, and the servant of God was greatly saddened at it. But a few days after that he had a vision well calculated to console him for his failure. He heard a heavenly voice, which said to him : " Thou

* The same thought fittingly found expression in the first Encyclical, *Reinstaurare*, of Pius X., affiliated as a tertiary to the Franciscan Order.—TRANSLATOR.

† Mohammedan priests.

shalt not be deprived of the martyr's palm ; but it is not in Egypt, nor under the edge of the sword, that thou shalt gather it."* Always submissive to the promptings of grace, he retraced his steps to Europe and awaited it.

It was on Monte Vernia, in 1224, the prophecy was fulfilled. It was there appeared to him the seraph with the six fiery wings ; from thence he descended, miraculously transformed, bearing in his flesh, like so many sparkling rubies, the marks of a crucifixion of which God alone could be the cause†—an incomparable honour, an honour unexampled in history,‡ but likewise a painful martyrdom, since St. Francis could not walk without atrocious sufferings.

On his return to Umbria he stopped at St. Damian's, where St. Clare could contemplate with her eyes this living crucifix. Filled with admiration and compassion, she hastened to construct for the Saint and his companions a hut of branches and reeds, and made him a pair of slippers or sandals of white skin, which enabled him to walk and concealed from indiscreet gaze the sight of the stigmata. She also prepared white linen to stanch the red blood that flowed from the wound in the side.§

* Bonaventure, *Vita S. Francisci*, c. ix.

† Friar Leo bears evidence to the prodigy of Monte Vernia in the note prefixed to the Blessing of St. Francis.

‡ Some authors have assumed from a passage in St. Paul's Epistles that the Apostle of the Gentiles had received the stigmata. See also note on stigmatization in the *Life of St. Francis* by Father Leopold de Chérancé, third edition, pp. 311, 312.

§ The sandals and linen are in possession of the Poor Clares of Assisi.

Who will tell us of her interior joy at the sight of the sanctity radiating from the whole person of the venerable Founder ?

For forty days she was made a sharer in his joys and sorrows. One day, the Franciscan chronicles tell us, she heard an unknown melody. It was the Saint, who, during an ecstasy, assured by revelation of being in the number of the elect, was improvising the famous canticle known as the *Canticle of the Sun*,* and inviting all creatures to join their voices to his in thanksgiving to the Author of every good and perfect gift. Clare listened, enraptured, to the lyrical notes of a poetry so novel and so true. She was still more enraptured when she learnt the *motif* that inspired it.

A few days afterwards the Poverello took leave of Clare and her companions to return to the labours of his apostolate. It was their last conversation, their last interview. The hour of deliverance was about to strike for the mystical martyr of Monte Vernia, the hour of separation and painful heart-wrenchings for his disciples and friends.

His farewells to earth were moving. He blessed Assisi, his native city ; he blessed his brethren gathered round his pallet, and all who were scattered over the surface of the globe. Could he forget his daughters of St. Damian's, they who continually

* The old chroniclers mention this laud under the title of " Canticle of Creation " (Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda*, p. iii., c. cxxxiii., and *Speculum Perfectionis*, c. c.). Bartholomew of Pisa was the first to have reproduced it (*Conformities*, p. ii., l. ii., fr. xi.). The original text is found at the back of the *Blessing of St. Francis* (treasured in the Sacro Convento, Assisi). See *Life of St. Francis* referred to in previous note, p. 257 *et seq.*

inquired about him, and were praying night and day for the prolongation of a life so dear to them all? Not only did he not forget them, but, according to the testimony of the old chronicles, he couched his reply in the tenderest terms. "For them, suffering so much as he was, he improvised another canticle, the last of his life, dictated a letter in which he exhorted them to persevere to the end in their admirable vocation, and joined to this message a last blessing."*

The form of the blessing and the canticle have not come down to us, but we are justified in believing that the letter is that which Clare has inserted in the Rule of 1224. It is the testament of a Saint addressed to a Saint, to whom he bequeaths what is most precious, a gem carefully chosen. We know what this gem was to the Poverello, but let us leave him to speak himself :

"I, your very little brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of our Most High Lord and His most blessed Mother, and to persevere therein to the end. I beg you, too, all you whom I regard as my Ladies, and I earnestly conjure you to conform yourselves always to this life and this glorious poverty. Be very careful never to diverge from it and give ear thereon to contrary maxims."†

To these various writings the dying Saint joined verbal instructions, which were equally valuable,

* It is to the *Speculum Perfectionis* we owe all these details.

† *Rule of St. Clare*, c. vi. The expressions of the venerable Foundress are most precise : "Paulo ante obitum suum, scripsit nobis ultimam voluntatem suam dicens . . ." (*Ibid.*). Then follows the letter.

for they were an answer to the fear, which the pious Abbess had often disclosed to him, of her going to the grave before having had the happiness of seeing him again. "Go," said he to the bearer of this message, "go and tell Sister Clare to be no longer sad. She and her companions shall see me again before dying, and they shall not be without experiencing great consolation therefrom."*

The task of the Umbrian reformer was ended. He caused himself to be laid upon ashes, to die in the arms of poverty, murmured with his failing voice the plaintive but hopeful notes of the psalm *Voce mea*, and when he had finished the last verse—"Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name: the just wait for me until Thou reward me"—he gave up his beautiful soul to God.

It was the 3rd of October, 1226. The obsequies were celebrated the next day with all the pomp the merits and great works of a man so privileged merited. The funeral procession passed by St. Damian's. The body, borne by two magistrates of Assisi and two Friars Minor, was brought into the chapel of the Poor Ladies. The face was uncovered, and the virgin Clare could satisfy at leisure her filial piety, venerate the transfigured remains of the martyr of Monte Vernia, and kiss his glorious stigmata. They tried, but in vain, to remove one of the nails from the hands, and had to content themselves with steeping a piece of linen in the blood of the wound and taking the dimensions of the corpse, to be able to faithfully reproduce the image of him whom they mourned. It was to her

* *Speculum Perfectionis*, c. cviii.

and her companions in their mourning an immense consolation, precisely that which the dying Patriarch had prophetically foretold.

These pious tributes beguiled their grief. But when the procession resumed its march, when they took from them the sacred remains, they broke out into sobs and made the cloister resound with their lamentations. None felt more than the Foundress the greatness of the loss they had sustained. She called herself an orphan, and exclaimed : " O blessed Father, you were the Founder of our Order, the light of our eyes, the support of our weakness. Without you what will become of us ?"*

The Saints do not forbid themselves either to love or to mourn, and Clare wept. But that fortitude, which was the special note of her character, quickly resumed its predominance ; and we are going to see her, during the twenty-seven years she will survive the Seraphic Patriarch, show herself to be the intrepid heiress of the master's mind and guardian of the primitive traditions in the midst of the sorrows and joys which deprived her of none of her firmness.

Death had been cruel to her. It deprived her successively, with a few years' interval, of several of her dearest spiritual daughters—Philippa Mareri, Foundress and Abbess of the monastery of Mareri, in 1236 ; Sister Balbina Corano, her niece, in 1240 ;

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima S. Francisci*, l. ii., c. iv. " Fundatorem, plantatorem et adiutorem nostrum . . ." (*Testam. S. Clare*). Giotto has immortalized this scene in one of the frescoes in the upper basilica of the Sacro Convento, a fresco known in art under the title of " Obsequies of St. Francis."

then Beatrix, her youngest sister, and Ortolana, her mother. But these mournings were mitigated by Christian hope, and soon followed by consolations, which caused the bitterness of separation to be forgotten. Since the year 1228 St. Francis was raised to the altars ; the memory of Ortolana, Beatrix, and Balbina was held in veneration ; and Philippa Mareri, the first of the Poor Ladies, was honoured with a public cultus, approved by Pope Innocent IV.* And Clare witnessed these popular ovations, these magnificent triumphs of holiness. How could she fail to deduce from them the conclusions derivable therefrom ? Was not the honour paid to the venerable Founder reflected on the three institutions he created ? And were not the miracles wrought at the tomb of Philippa Mareri in particular, and the honours decreed to her by the Church, Heaven's answer to all doubts, a manifest approval of the form of life adopted at St. Damian's, and, as it were, the consecration of Franciscan poverty ? So the virgin Clare understood it ; and this thought, like a ray of light, shed gladness on her solitude, light on all her movements, and permeated all her correspondence.

* Pius VII. ratified the immemorial *cultus* of the Blessed Philippa Mareri.

CHAPTER XXI

HER CORRESPONDENCE

UP to this we have followed her first biographer, Thomas of Celano, the portrait he has drawn for us of his heroine is so faithful, the picture so life-like. Still—let us hasten to say it—there are some things lacking. The author therein depicts, and we have seen with what vigorous touches, the “valiant woman” of the Gospel, and compels us to admire along with him the austere Foundress, the emulator of the Patriarch of Assisi, the advocate of the Franciscan idea ; but he hardly reveals the interior sentiments, the inner voices, and all those recesses of the conscience which hold the secret of a life. Happily, another writer has undertaken to partly supply what is wanting in him ; and this writer is Clare herself, in some letters of hers extant. There she reveals herself to us in quite a new light—not only a magnanimous character, but endowed with a rich imagination, a cultured mind, and a sensitive and delicate heart. Elsewhere they make her speak ; here it is she herself who speaks. We may trust her evidence, for her language is sincere, unstudied, unaffected.

Of the different letters she had occasion to write to her daughters, only five have come down to us : four

were sent to Blessed Agnes of Bohemia, and the fifth to Sister Ermentrude. They are replies, and we have not the letters which prompted them. None bears any date, and in this connection we are confined to probable, or at least plausible, conjectures. To throw some light on the difficulties, let us say a word of each of the two correspondents, whom we have only previously mentioned in the chapter on Foundations.

The chronological order first brings before us Agnes of Bohemia, the first Princess of blood royal who entered the Order of the Poor Ladies, thirty years before the Blessed Isabella of France. She was born in Prague in 1205, daughter of Ottocar I., King of Bohemia, and Constance of Hungary, sister of Andrew II. and aunt of the illustrious St. Elizabeth. Mysterious forecasts accompanied her birth, announcing her future vocation. One night her mother saw her in a dream lay aside the royal mantle to put on the coarse habit of an unknown Order, a strange dream which was yet to be realized, but preceded by a series of adventures in apparent contradiction to her predicted destiny.*

From her tenderest age, when three years old, she was affianced to Boleslas, son of St. Edwige and Henry, Duke of Silesia, the Cistercian nuns of Treibnitz, in Silesia, being meanwhile entrusted with her education. Three years afterwards Boleslas died, and the young Princess was brought back to Bohemia, and confided to the care of the Premonstratensian nuns of Doxane, but only for a short time. In 1214 there was a new marriage projected, and a new exodus. After an embassy in which

* *Acta SS.*, March 6 (1205-1281).

Frederick II. asked her hand for Prince Henry, his son, Agnes, then aged nine, was sent to the Court of the Dukes of Austria, according to the custom of the time, to learn the German language and be initiated in the manners of the country. But Prince Henry, turning his eyes in another direction, broke off this alliance, and the daughter of the King of Bohemia returned to the palace of her ancestors, happy to see her chains broken, and being able to consecrate herself to God; for during her exile, and despite all obstacles, trained in the school of adversity, alone, in presence of the Queen of Heaven, she made a vow of virginity. So when, towards 1230, the Emperor Frederick II. and King Henry III. of England solicited in turn her hand, and Frederick II. was accepted by her father, she appealed to the authority of the Holy See, and not in vain. Gregory IX. undertook her defence before Wenceslas, successor of Ottocar I., and the irascible Frederick II. himself was appeased. Informed of Agnes's decision, he could not refrain from exclaiming: "If she had preferred a mortal man to me, I would have taken armed vengeance, but I cannot find it ill that she should prefer the King of Heaven to me."* And the Princess, at last free to dispose of herself, thought only of putting her pious design into execution; but what cloister was she to choose?

The Friars Minor had recently established themselves at Prague, thanks to the protection of her father, Ottocar I. They sounded before her the praises of their Seraphic Father, who had just been raised to the altar. They could not silently pass

* *Acta SS., loc. cit.*

over the name of his coadjutrix, Clare, Abbess of St. Damian's, in whom lived again the spirit and virtues of St. Francis. It was a flash of light to Agnes. She resolved to be aggregated to a Congregation environed with the glory of the Seraphic Patriarch, and submitted her desire to the approval of the Foundress. It is to this desire, we think, St. Clare's first letter to her refers—a letter which is, in any case, a kind of epithalamium in honour of virginity and seraphic poverty. Here is the translation:

“ To the illustrious and venerable virgin Agnes, daughter of the mighty and ever-victorious King of Bohemia, Clare, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ and of the virgins consecrated to God in the monastery of St. Damian, pays her spiritual homage, and respectfully and with all her heart wishes the glory of eternal felicity.

“ The renown of thy holy and blameless life, already known throughout the whole world, has reached us ; wherefore we greatly rejoice in the Lord, I and my companions, who wish to fulfil the Divine will, persevering faithfully in the service of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone knows that thou hast renounced the highest honours, a distinction the most enviable in the world, the very throne of the most august Cæsar, in whom thou mightest have had a consort suited to thy majesty and his, and in place of that hast embraced with all thy soul's affection poverty, mortification of the flesh, and the humiliation of Our Divine Saviour, Whom thou hast chosen for thy spouse in preference to the noblest of others. He, by His grace, will

preserve stainless and intact the treasure of thy virginity. His power surpasses every earthly power; there is nothing to compare with His favours and His beauty, which surpass all others; His love will satisfy all thy desires and exceeds all the pleasures of this world. Thou wert, then, very fortunate to have chosen for thy spouse Him Who, according to the words of Scripture, adorns the breast with precious stones, the ears with rings of inestimable value, the sides with a girdle of finest gold, the head with a splendid crown impressed with the seal of sanctity. For this reason, my dearest Sister and venerable Lady, being spouse, sister, and mother in Our Lord Jesus Christ, thou oughtest to march proudly to fight under the banner of spotless virginity and that most holy poverty thou hast chosen for thy lady and mistress. Meanwhile, with all the courage and fervour of thy soul, continue to advance rapidly in the way of the imitation of Jesus Christ, Who, for love of us, to free us from the slavery of the Prince of Darkness, and to reconcile us with His Eternal Father, was born poor, lived poor, and died poor, amid incomprehensible torments on the Cross. Oh, blessed poverty, to which is promised the Kingdom of Heaven and everlasting glory! Oh, holy poverty, which is accompanied by so many precious gifts and a life so happy and restful to all who love and embrace thee! Oh, lovable poverty, which the Lord, Who has created all things by His word alone, and has governed and governs them with absolute power, had so much at heart and set such value! This same Lord assured us of it, saying: 'The birds of

the air have their nests, and the foxes their holes, but the Son of man has not whereon to lay His head.' And, in truth, from the day the Divine Word descended into the womb of the most spotless Virgin to unite Himself to our humanity, He became poor and destitute, in order that men, poor and destitute of heavenly things, might become rich in the treasures of grace and possessors of the Kingdom of Heaven. Since, then, the only-begotten Son of God only rested His suffering head upon a cross, canst thou not, O my dearest daughter, rejoice with all thy heart and superabound with spiritual delight, preferring the world's scorn to its allurements, poverty to wealth, and heaven's treasures to those of earth? I need not certainly remind thee of what thou believest with a firm and true faith, that the Kingdom of Heaven is promised to the poor in spirit, and that one cannot serve at the same time two masters without displeasing one or other. Thou knowest that he who is hampered by garments cannot compete with one who is nude, so thou canst not combat with the hope of victory without absolute self-despoilment and abandoning all the world's adornments, which the enemy uses as snares to capture us. O, Sister, how difficult it is to live in splendour in this world and then reign with Christ in the other! Said the same Truth: 'It is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven.' Thou hast acted wisely in throwing off those superfluous garments, the goods of this world, to be freer and disembarassed in the combat, and entering on the more difficult and narrow way, because it is the way

that leads to glory. O fortunate exchange! To leave earthly for heavenly goods, to merit immortal honours by the sacrifice of the things of this world, to gain a hundred for one, and secure for thyself a never-ending life of happiness—i' faith, it is a traffic worthy of all praise, and shows rare prudence. For which reason I have resolved to conjure thee in the bowels of Jesus Christ to persevere in the service of the King of kings. Become daily better, go from virtue to virtue, so that the Lord, Whom thou servest with all thy heart's affection, may ever adorn thee more with His graces and further enrich thee with His heavenly gifts. Again I pray thee to be mindful of me, thy most unworthy servant, and the other religious Sisters who live with me in this monastery. Deign to commend me to God in thy prayers, that, aided and succoured by thy merits, we may also become worthy of the mercy of Jesus Christ, and to be called when it shall please Him to enjoy His beatific vision. Live well in the Lord and pray for me. Alleluia !”*

Clare entrusted this missive to five of her religious, carefully chosen, and destined to become the nucleus of the Prague community. A few weeks afterwards the Sisters arrived, safe and sound, in the capital of Bohemia, where they were impatiently awaited, and they hastened to deliver to Agnes the treasures they had brought so far. These treasures were a copy of the Rule of 1224, the letter of their Foundress, and three or four characteristic presents, among others the *Pater Noster* illuminated, as well

* *Acta SS.*, March 6.

as a veil and cope which belonged to her*—souvenirs of very little intrinsic importance, but they came from a Saint in token of her affection, and that was enough for the pious recipient to attach to them an infinite value. While the latter was studying the Constitutions the monastery at Prague was built—cells, enclosure, preparations, everything was finished for the Pentecost of 1236. On that day the Alleluia which went up from the slopes of Assisi resounded along the banks of the Moldau when the Blessed Agnes received the veil at the hands of the Apostolic Nuncio, in presence of seven Bishops, the Royal Family, and the nobility of the country. She was the first Abbess of the Prague monastery.

Soon in Bohemia, as in Umbria, arose the question of absolute poverty ; but Agnes refused no less firmly than Clare the endowments and possessions offered her, and by dint of entreaties likewise obtained from Gregory IX. authorization for herself and her nuns to be no longer molested on this subject. On her part the Foundress, in the following letter, encouraged her to proceed resolutely in this way ; the address already epitomizes her whole mind :

“ To the daughter of the King of kings, to the queen of virgins, to the most worthy spouse of Jesus Christ, to Agnes, truly queen by this union, Clare, unworthy servant of the poor religious of St. Damian’s, health and the good fortune to always live in the loftiest poverty.

“ Thanksgiving be unceasingly made to the Author of every good, to Him from Whom is derived

* The Bollandists (March 6) indicate the *Pater* ; Bartholomew of Pisa (p. ii., l. i., fr. viii.), the other presents.

every perfection and emanate all those heavenly gifts and virtues with which He is pleased to enrich thy heart. Sanctify thyself in so many ways and raise thyself to such a degree of purity that His glance may not find in thee any stain or anything repulsive. O thou a thousand times fortunate ! since one day thou wilt be united to the Heavenly King in eternal beatitude in the splendid abode where He dwells upon a starry throne. Thou hast left behind thee the grandeurs of earthly kingdoms, thou hast despised the glory of an imperial alliance, and, wholly enamoured of the unknown attractions of poverty, hast designed to walk in the footsteps of thy crucified Love ; and assuredly thou art worthy of the heavenly espousals to which thou aspiest. Wherefore, knowing that thy heart is the sanctuary of every Christian virtue, I should not use many words with thee, although thou wouldst not find anything superfluous in words from which we could bring some consolation to our souls ; but I certainly ought not to pass over one thing which I deem most necessary, and it is the obligation which is imposed on us of always persevering in good resolutions, with which God in His mercy may be pleased to inspire us. I pray thee, then, by the love of Him to Whom thou hast offered thyself as an odorous holocaust, to never forget thy vocation, and to remember, like Rachel, thy beginning—that is, to keep continually before thy mind those blessed days on which thou didst renounce the world's pleasures. Jealously preserve what thou hast already gained ; what thou dost, do it without stopping half-way. Tread with agile step, without

resting much upon the earth, that the dust of earthly things may not soil thee. Preserve a joyful and tranquil conscience, pursuing thy way earnestly, without minding or consenting to anything that may move thee from thy good resolution or put an obstacle in thy way. Always aim at that height of perfection to which God calls thee, that thou mayest be encouraged to pray incessantly to the Most High for it, and to follow at all times the commandments of the Lord and the counsels of Brother Elias, our Father and Minister-General.* Yes, persist in the firm resolution of observing these in preference to other counsels, and counting them as a precious treasure. If anyone should dare to say to thee anything contrary to thy perfection and opposed to God's vocation, don't listen, even if he were to load thee with goods and honours, and render thee superior to all the rest of men. No, those are not the goods and honours thou shouldst desire. Live poor, live attached to Jesus Christ in His poverty, seek the humiliations He willed to befall thee, and follow Him even at the risk of becoming the talk and the laughing-stock of the world to please Him. Thy Heavenly Spouse is 'beautiful above the sons of men,' and yet He became 'the opprobrium of men and the outcast of the people.' His body was furrowed with scourges, and He breathed His last breath upon the Cross, convulsed with pain. Canst thou, then, O illustrious Princess, canst thou after all that not feel

* Brother Elias was deprived of office in 1239. His name, mentioned here, proves that the second letter, as well as the first, is anterior to that date.

filled with fervour to imitate Him? Ah! if thou wilt suffer with Him, thou wilt be glorified with Him; if thou weepest with Him, thou wilt be inebriated with joy; if thou ascendest with Him the Cross, thou wilt undoubtedly experience with Him the ineffable delights which He possesses amid the splendour of the Saints. Thy name will then be written in the Book of Life, and will be glorious for ever and ever. For the fleeting goods of this world thou wilt receive the good things of heaven, and at the price of some suffering thou wilt live happy in eternal beatitude. Meanwhile live well, O my beloved Sister, O virgin blessed in the Name of thy Spouse. Remember that my Sisters and I continually rejoice at the good gifts with which God has loaded thee, and have the liveliest confidence in thy prayers. Do not cease, then, in union with thy Sisters, to commend us heartily to the Lord.”*

Such thoughts, it must be confessed, are beyond the reach of vulgar minds, but they respond to the aspirations of certain chosen souls hungering for light and love, like the daughter of the King of Bohemia. She liked that austere mysticism, she relished it, she made it the law of her life, and, confronted with new cares, she again had recourse to the same source, to the direction of the Abbess of St. Damian's. Hence a third and fourth letter, replying to a third and fourth request.

* *Acta SS.*, March 6; Loccatelli, l. iii., c. v.

CHAPTER XXII

HER LAST LETTERS

It is in her third letter, the most remarkable of all, that the seraphic virgin completely reveals to Blessed Agnes the aim of the Second Order and the ideal in view—co-operation in the sacerdotal apostolate.

“To the virgin I ought to honour in Our Lord Jesus Christ above every other, to her who is dearer to me than all mortals, to Sister Agnes, daughter of the most serene King of Bohemia, and now sister and spouse of the Monarch of Heaven: Clare, humble and unworthy servant of God and of the poor virgins, joyful greeting in the Author of Salvation and all best wishes.

“The tidings received of thy health and of thy progress in the way of salvation, of the fervour in which thou perseverest so admirably in view of the eternal rewards, continually fill my heart with indescribable delight. I give myself up to transports of the liveliest joy in thinking how indefatigable thou art in imitating Jesus, poor and humble, making amends for our defects, and exceeding compensation for our coldness in following this Divine example. I may well, then, rejoice in

the Lord, without fearing that anyone can deprive me of this consolation, when I see how courageously thou dost triumph over the craftiness of the common enemy and the human pomp that puffs up and occasions the loss of the sons of men. It is certain that a rare prudence directs thee, that the grace of God sustains thee, that thou hast finally found the treasure of which the Gospel speaks, and hast received it from the hands of Him Who by His power has created all things out of nothing, and seekest to possess the merit of humility, faith, and poverty, which thou hast chosen for thy portion. In this manner, to use the words of the Apostle, thou hast become the co-operatrix of God, the co-adjutrix of Jesus Christ, in the sublime work of the sanctification of souls ; thou hast made thyself the support and strength of the weak and suffering members of His mystical body. Wherefore—I repeat it once again with full confidence—no one can hinder me from rejoicing thereat ; and thou, my sweetest Sister, may derive consolation from it, not to allow the shadow of sadness to cloud the serenity and calmness of thy spirit. O virgin, dear to me in Jesus Christ, joy of the angels and our Sisters' crown, raise thy mind's eyes towards the mirrors of eternity, reflect seriously on the vivid splendours of everlasting glory ; reflect on the invisible and abiding form of the Divine Essence, and in this blessed contemplation of His attributes, interiorly transformed into the image of His Divinity, taste what His friends experience and have a foretaste of the hidden joys which the Almighty has prepared from eternity for His elect and all

who, abhorring the allurements of the deceitful and deceived world, leave to earth its pomps and vanities. With all the powers of thy soul love Him Who immolated Himself for thee, He whose infinite perfections astound the sun and moon, and whose power is illimitable. Love the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, the Divine Word that became incarnate in a Virgin, remaining a virgin still. Love that most holy Mother, who has conceived in her chaste womb Him Whom she could not contain, who has held Him to her chaste bosom, and fed Him with her milk. Alas ! the misery of men who, by an inexplicable blindness, render fruitless these moving mysteries ! the malice of that infernal enemy who tempts the human race, and causes them to lose the value of such a great sacrifice through fleeting and frivolous goods ! O my dearest Sister, there is no spectacle more impressive than a human soul that believes in its Lord ! It is greater than heaven itself ; whereas all other things created are incapable of containing the Creator, only a believing soul is His abiding place, His seat and His throne, as the same Divine Truth assures us, saying : ' He who loveth Me will be loved by My Father ; We will come to him, and We will make Our abode in him.' And what honour could be greater than this ? In the same manner as the most glorious Queen of Virgins has borne the God-Man in her chaste womb, so thou who hast imitated her so well in humility and poverty can bear Him always spiritually in thy heart. So many Kings and Queens, whose pride now engages in conflict with heaven and smites the firmament,

will then be cast into the dust, when thou and the other Sisters, holding wealth in horror, will enjoy in eternity the plenitude of unchangeable felicity."

Replying to a query regarding feasts on which it would be permissible to partake of food other than that ordinarily used, she adds :

"The most precise rule that I can point to in this connection is to remind thee of those feasts which our Holy Father St. Francis enjoined on us to celebrate with extraordinary solemnity. Without, however, dealing in this place with those weak and sickly Sisters whom our blessed Founder commanded us to treat with more kindly concern, which is the best that could be given us, I shall only say to thee that for those who are robust and in good health it is not lawful, either on holidays or feast-days, to desire other food than that allowed in Lent. . . . Meanwhile, as our flesh is not bronze, nor has it the strength of marble, I conjure thee by my true and living God to moderate somewhat the extreme rigour of the abstinences that thou dost practise, because to live in complete confidence in God it is enough to render Him a reasonable service, and that the holocaust thou offerest Him is also seasoned with the salt of Christian prudence."*

Finally comes, after a long interval, the fourth letter, which closes the Slav series. It is a contemplation of the mystery of the Crib. One feels, from the closing lines, that Clare is nearing the grave, and that they are the last self-revealings of

* *Acta SS.*, March 6 ; Loccatelli, l. 3, c. v.

a mother to her daughter. From the beginning the words are more laudatory and affectionate than usual.

“ To the half of my soul, to the tabernacle of the Divine Spirit, to the most serene Queen Agnes, my most beloved Mother and daughter, esteemed above all : Clare, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ, and useless servant of her Sisters enclosed in the monastery of St. Damian, health and the grace to be able to sing the new canticle with the other holy virgins before the throne of God and the Lamb, and to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

“ O Mother, O daughter, O spouse of the King of all ages, if I have not written to thee so often as my soul and thine would have wished, don't wonder very much at it, nor think that the fire of that love which I feel for thee is ever diminished. Be convinced that I love thee as thou lovest thy mother. The sole cause that has put an obstacle to more frequent communications and the fewness of the missives is the insecurity of the roads. Now, however, that I have found a favourable opportunity of sending this, I am really glad and rejoice at it. O spouse of Jesus Christ, as the first St. Agnes lived wholly united to the Lamb without spot Who taketh away the sins of the world, so it has been given to thee to taste the ineffable delights of this union, regarded with amazement by the heavenly hosts, which enraptures all and inebriates with supreme sweetness, causes the dead to live again, constitutes the happiness of the citizens of the Heavenly Jeru-

saalem, and is the reflection, the glory, and the mirror of the eternal splendours. Look at thyself intently every day in this mirror, O spouse of Jesus Christ ; often contemplate thy figure, to embellish it within and without with all the most attractive and varied flowers of virtue, to adorn thyself with those ornaments most suitable to a spouse of the Supreme King. Yes, it is lawful for thee, O my beloved, to delight thyself by looking in this mirror. Come at least and contemplate the good Jesus lying in a manger, wrapped in poor swaddling clothes. O God ! was ever such condescension as this ? The King of angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, exposed in a wretched manger ! In the midst of this mirror recognize holy and humble poverty, for love of which He deigned to suffer so much. Finally, at the extremity of this same mirror see that ineffable Love which willed to be nailed to the Cross and die an infamous death. This mirror affixed to the Cross is an admonition to the bystander, and says to all : ‘ All ye who pass by the way, come and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow.’ Ah ! let us answer Him Who appeals to us and thus laments ; let us respond with one voice : ‘ I shall always remember Thee, and condole with Thee with my whole soul.’ Be daily more inflamed with this holy fire, my queen, and keep before thy mind the incomparable delights, the infinite riches, and the everlasting honours of the King of Heaven, and in the uplifting of thy holy aspirations exclaim with all thy soul : ‘ Draw me to Thee ; I will run after the odour of Thy perfumes. Yes, my Divine Spouse, I shall run

after Thee without ever stopping until Thou leadest me into the mystical wine-cellar, until Thou placest Thy left hand under my head and Thy right hand shall embrace me, and Thy mouth impress a kiss on mine.' While thou thus contempest, remember thy poor Mother; and I assure thee that I have thy blessed name written in the core of my heart. that thou art my loved one. But where love is concerned the tongue of the body ought to be silent; it is rather for the tongue of the spirit to speak, because, my sweet daughter, my love cannot be otherwise expressed. For that purpose how insufficient is what I have written! Receive it with discretion and charity; it will at least disclose the maternal love I cherish for thee and thy daughters. O Agnes, my worthiest Sister, I warmly commend myself and my companions to thy prayers. Farewell, dearest! farewell to all thy daughters, until we meet before the throne of God's glory! and pray for us. Amen."*

Where love is concerned the tongue of the body ought to be silent; it is for the tongue of the spirit to speak. One feels that in the Abbess of St. Damian's it is the heart that speaks, and with what affection! Maternal love has rarely made itself heard in more exquisite accents; rarely, also, has Divine love spoken a sweeter language—language ever young, ever new, because it bears the impress of that evangelical poetry which is never old.

These letters are among the pearls of Franciscan literature, the literary gems of the Middle Ages.

* *Acta SS.*, March 6.

They awaken in the mind the idea of a faith and manners we no longer know, and for us have, beside their intrinsic value, the attraction of the past—of a glorious past which has witnessed the birth of the masterpieces of mysticism, the book of the *Imitation* and the *Itinerarium* of St. Bonaventure. But for the Blessed Agnes of Bohemia these leaves had other attractions. A breathing from Umbria had passed over them; a great Saint had put something of her soul into them. They were not only souvenirs: they were relics. In 1255 Agnes had Clare's veil and cope enshrined in gold and precious stones. She did not wait for the Saint's canonization to venerate her four autographs; she engraved their lessons in her memory, and, after having been a docile disciple, became herself an excellent mistress in the ways of monastic perfection.

Sister Ermentrude, the second recipient of Clare's missives, is less known than the Abbess of Prague. Going forth from Cologne, she had retired to Bruges, and gathered round her in a kind of hermitage a few young girls, drawn by the spectacle of her virtues. But she had no precise Rule. Ermentrude then acted after the manner of the Saints: she had recourse to prayer. "Lord," she cried, "enlighten me, and show me the way which should lead me to Thee!" And at that moment she heard an interior voice which said to her: "Take as your model the Virgin of Assisi." She was not deceived—the Virgin of Assisi, by which the Friars Minor, already long established in Belgium, loved to designate the coadjutrix of St. Francis. She hastened

then to write to her, awaiting her reply like an order from heaven. Here is this reply, in which the Abbess of St. Damian's gives an abridgment of her spiritual doctrine :

“ To her dearest Sister Ermentrude, Clare of Assisi, humble servant of Jesus Christ, health and peace.

“ We have lately learnt, dearest Sister, how, by the grace of the Lord, thou hast renounced the world, and never felt more rejoiced, marvelling at thy generous resolve and thy inimitable fervour in running the race of perfection in company with thy good companions. I beg thee to be faithful unto death to the Divine Spouse to Whom thou hast consecrated thyself, and make sure that in reward for thy labours thou shalt receive the crown of immortality. The time of trial is short, that of reward eternal. Don't be dazzled with the world's splendour, which passes away like a shadow ; don't be deceived by its outside shows, which contain nothing but illusions. The infernal dragon will prowl round thee, hissing horribly, but don't listen resist intrepidly, and he will take to flight. Be careful, my beloved, not to be cast down by adversities, and never let thy heart be puffed up with pride in the midst of prosperity, for the property of faith is to make us humble when fortunate and impassive when the contrary befalls us. Render to God the service thou hast vowed to Him, render it with diligence and punctuality, for know well that He will indemnify thee for thy sacrifices. Often raise thine eyes to heaven, which invites thee to take up

the Cross and follow Christ, Who precedes thee, since it is written that only through many tribulations thou shalt enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Finally, love with all the power of thy soul that supremely adorable God and His Divine Son, Who willed to be crucified for our sins. Oh, the thought of God—this salutary thought should never leave thy mind! Meditate continually on the mysteries of His Passion, and the sorrows His Most Holy Mother felt nigh the Cross. Join action to fervent and uninterrupted prayer, and, ever alert and attentive, strive perseveringly to finish the good work thou hast so well begun. Discharge the duties of thy office, living in absolute poverty and sincere humility. Let no fear stop thee half way, because, my dearest daughter, the Lord is faithful to His word and holy in all His operations, and will pour down upon thee and thy nuns abundant benedictions. He will be thy Shield, thy Consolation, thy Redeemer, and thy Eternal Reward. Meanwhile let us pray for one another, and, supported by the sweet yoke of charity, we shall easily observe the laws of Jesus Christ.”*

The office to which St. Clare alludes in her letter was the office of Abbess. Ermentrude responded entirely to the confidence reposed in her. She introduced the Rule of 1224 into her Community in Bruges, and her monastery was the centre whence the seraphic spirit radiated over the rest of Flanders and the North of France.

Let us congratulate her on the zeal she displayed

* MS. of Bruges : Wadding, t. iv., *ad. ann.* 1257.

for the cause of the Franciscan idea, and acknowledge that it is to Clare's two correspondents, Agnes of Bohemia and Ermentrude, we owe the bequest of this little treasure of spirituality, this fountain of living water, of which, in succession to them, numbers of souls, eager for light and perfection, will drink.

From a psychological viewpoint, the epistles we are studying possess an importance which none will fail to see. They complete historical documents; and our readers will remain convinced, along with us, that to acquire a thorough knowledge of the Foundress of the Poor Ladies, her mental resources, the richness of her talents, the harmonious chords of her soul, it is necessary to read and ponder over her letters.

Interesting in this regard, they are not sufficient, however, to explain to us her marvellous influence over her contemporaries. After all, they were only private writings, not destined from their character to go outside the circle of Franciscan monasteries. That a woman should attract public attention and move Europe as St. Clare did needed other elements of action—the direct intervention of Providence, or acts of heroism. Now, in her these two elements of action were found combined, united by a hidden force, and they were to impart to her name an irresistible power—the power of the wonder-worker, enhanced by the glory of sanctity.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WONDER-WORKER

THE miracle is God's sanction, an inimitable sanction, which He appends to His works when He pleases and how He pleases and by His chosen creatures. Creatures thus invested with a share of His omnipotence bear in history the name of wonder-workers. Such, in particular, are St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony of Padua ; such, although with less lustre, is their contemporary, St. Clare.

Of the different prodigies recorded in the narratives of her biographers the first relate to "the privilege of poverty," which will surprise no one. By a sublime act of confidence in God's goodness, she had despoiled herself of everything ; the Most High, in return, succoured her in moments of distress and protected her in perils. It was the reward. But let us leave Thomas of Celano to tell us, in the charming language of simple faith, of some of those supernatural manifestations.

One day during one of those invasions of Frederick II. which spread ruin through Italy, famine made itself felt in the monastery of St. Damian. At the meal-hour Sister Cecilia of Spello, the Procurator of the convent, laid sadly before the Abbess

the only remaining loaf—one solitary loaf for fifty nuns! “My daughter,” said Clare, “divide the loaf in two. Thou wilt send half to our good Brother-questors, and of the other half thou wilt make fifty parts, as many as there are Sisters. Then ring for dinner.” “But, Mother, to make so many parts of a morsel of bread it would need that the hand of the Lord should renew for us the marvels He wrought of yore in favour of Israel.” “Wherefore doubtful, my daughter?” replied Clare, with an angelic smile on her lips and a gentle, reproachful glance. “Go and do in the spirit of faith what I have commanded thee.” Then the venerable Abbess invited her companions to pray along with her, and during their prayer the bread multiplied in the hands of the wondering Sister Cecilia. All the Sisters ate, were completely satisfied, and together returned thanks to the Lover of the voluntary poor.

Another time it was oil that was wanting. The jar assigned to this purpose was empty. The Saint cleanses it and gives it to one of the Brother-almoners, requesting him to go and quest for a little oil among their benefactors. But lo! the religious, taking the vessel, which he thought was empty, finds it full to the brim. “These ladies are making game of me,” he murmured in a low voice. But suddenly raising his eyes, he understands, by the ecstatic movement of the Abbess, that he is in presence of the supernatural, and that the Lord is paternally kind to the humble virgin, as He had been before to the widow of Sarepta.*

No doubt these miraculous multiplications are

* *Vita S. Claræ*, c. ii.

not rare in the annals of hagiography, but they acquire from the circumstances a particular signification, and seem to say to all, to the Sisters as well as to the Friars: "Listen to St. Clare, hearken to St. Francis. Don't accuse them of temerity, for Heaven is on their side." This thought is incorporated in a charming legend of the *Fioretti*.

One day the Holy Father went to the monastery of St. Damian to hear St. Clare, whom the *Fioretti* calls "the most devout disciple and noble plant of Messer Santo Francesco," discourse of heavenly and Divine things; for she was of such sanctity that not only Bishops and Cardinals, but even the Pope, desired, with great affection, to see and hear her, and often visited her personally. While they were together, engaged in divers discourses, St. Clare meanwhile had the tables prepared and the bread placed thereon, so that the Pope might bless it. Then, the conversation ended, St. Clare, kneeling with great reverence, begged him to be pleased to bless the bread laid on the table. The Holy Father replied: "Most faithful Sister Clare, I wish that thou shouldst bless these loaves, and make over them the sign of the most holy Cross of Christ, to which thou hast entirely given thyself." St. Clare said: "Most Holy Father, pardon me, who would be worthy of great rebuke if, in presence of the Vicar of Christ, I, who am a miserable little woman, should presume to give this blessing." And the Pope responded: "In order that this may not be imputed to presumption, but to the merit of obedience, I command thee, through holy obedience, that thou make over

these loaves the sign of the most holy Cross, and bless them in the Name of God." Then St. Clare, like a true daughter of obedience, most devoutly blessed the loaves. At once there appeared in all those loaves the sign of the Cross most beautifully engraven. A portion of them were eaten and a portion preserved as relics. The Holy Father, seeing that a miracle had been wrought, taking some of the loaves and giving thanks to God, departed, leaving St. Clare his blessing. At that time there abode in the monastery Sister Ortolana, St. Clare's mother, and Sister Agnes, her own sister, full, says the *Fioretti*, of virtue and of the Holy Spirit, and many other holy nuns, to whom St. Francis sent many sick and infirm, who by their prayers and by the sign of the most holy Cross were all restored to health.*

This language was understood by the Sisters; the hesitating were confirmed, and all, enlightened as to the providential mission of their Foundress, took upon them again with more courage, more ardour, the sanctifying but always crucifying yoke of religious abnegation.

Heaven was visibly with the seraphic virgin, and the more she disengaged herself from earthly things and shrank into her nothingness, the more it was pleased to exalt her above her companions and hold her up to popular veneration. Visions, ecstasies, the gift of prophecy, the gift of tears—all those

* *Fioretti*, c. xxxiii. This episode is found in the Manuscript 4354 in the Vatican Library (see the *Speculum Perfectionis*, ed. Paul Sabatier, c. clxxxv.). The Bollandists note that Surius and several old manuscripts make no mention of it.

operations of grace, allied in her to an admirable correctness of judgment—could not fail to draw public attention to her.

But humanity is suffering ; it thinks chiefly of its own ills, and will always prefer the wonder-workers who heal its wounds to ecstasies rapt in contemplation. Now, our Saint was one of those benefactors raised up by God ; it follows even from the depositions collected by Thomas of Celano that the gift of healing was her special privilege. With her there was no need of long speech ; a word, a tear, was sufficient. She then implored the assistance of Him Who with a word cured the lepers and paralytics of the Gospel ; and to clearly prove that she was only an instrument in the hands of God, she habitually contented herself with making the sign of the Cross. It was thus she delivered several of her companions of their pains or infirmities—Sister Benvenuta of Assisi of a purulent ulcer ; Sister Amata Corano of fever and dropsy ; Sister Benvenuta of Perugia of loss of voice ; and Sister Christina of a deafness which had resisted all the resources of science. One day when she visited the monastery infirmary she found five of her nuns stretched on their pallets. She made over each of them the sign of the Cross, and the five invalids rose, radically cured, thanking God and His faithful servant for so great a benefit.*

The rumour of these events was noised abroad. The name of the wonder-worker passed from mouth to mouth throughout Umbria and Tuscany, and the sick crowded round St. Damian's. They came to

* *Vita S. Clarae*, c. iv.

St. Clare as before they went to St. Francis, and St. Damian's soon became the meeting-place of all human miseries. "Her prayers are a fire that consumes me,"* cried one of the spirits by the voice of a demoniac of Pisa. If the prayers of the seraphic virgin were a burning fire to the demons, they were a refreshing dew to the sick. Thomas of Celano cites some incidents in support of this assertion, notably the miraculous cure of a child of Perugia, another child of Spoleto, and the possessed woman of Pisa. Then, dreading doubtless to weary the reader by an enumeration which would be nothing more than a tedious nomenclature, he stops, and concludes this chapter with this laconic sentence: "All whom St. Clare marked with the sign of the Cross were cured,"† a sentence which implies a considerable number of miracles.

After God, the Saints love nothing so much as their country and the place where Providence has placed their birth. This sentiment, we have seen, is strikingly evident in St. Agnes, "the exile of Florence." It is found to exist with no less intensity in the heart of her eldest sister, St. Clare. She cherished a special love for her little city of Assisi. None of its inhabitants was a stranger to her. She took an interest in their joys, shared in their griefs, consoled them in their trials, and spared no effort to appease family dissensions, as happened to two noble ladies, unjustly abandoned, whom she recon-

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. v.

† "Quotquot signabuntur, remedium transportabant" (*Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*).

ciled with their husbands.* Better still, by her prayers and her miracles she was their chief benefactress, and in public calamities, in the midst of the wars then so frequent, she constituted herself their advocate and liberatrix.

The great orator of this epoch, St. Anthony of Padua, in a fine burst of eloquence, had uttered this expression, the boldness of which, after all, is founded on the goodness of God : " To win a victory, to save an empire, the prayer of a single just man is worth more than impregnable fortresses and big battalions." History was in agreement here with the celebrated Franciscan. Had not St. Geneviève of Nanterre, St. Loup, and St. Leo successively driven back Attila's hordes from the walls of Paris, Troyes, and Rome ? And did not he himself stop in his career the ferocious Ezzelino, that other scourge of God ? St. Clare was to add a page to these triumphs of prayer. She was to become, in her turn, the liberatrix of Assisi on two memorable occasions, the memory of which contemporary documents and local traditions have religiously preserved.

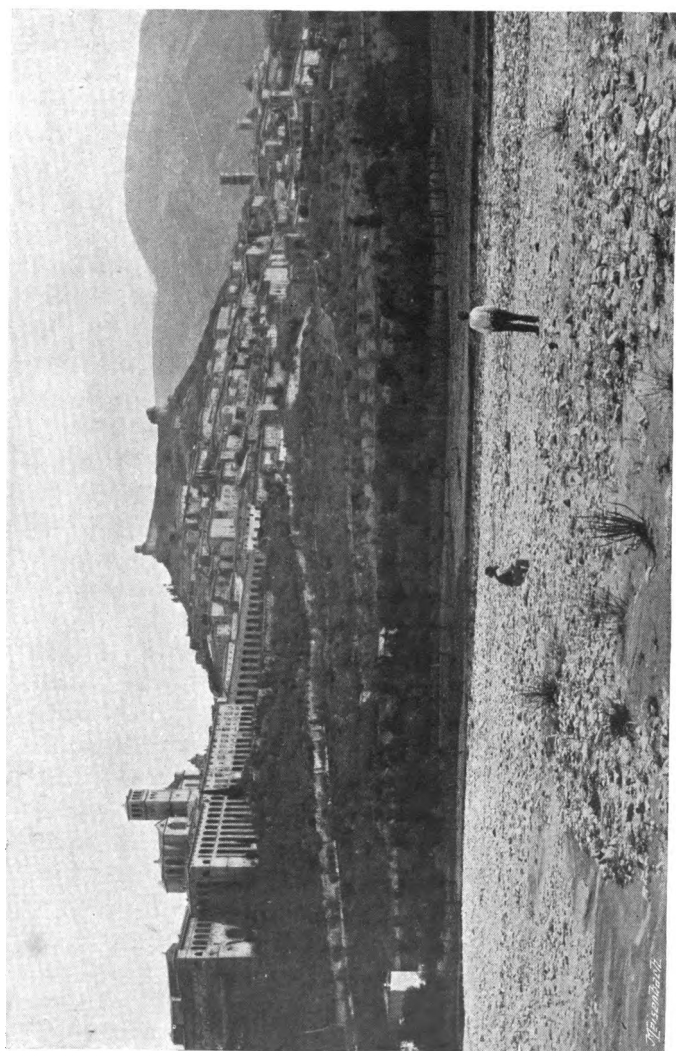
* The Acts for the process of canonization name the two husbands, Pietro Giardone, of Assisi, and Ugolino, of the Valley of Spoleto. See Wadding, *ad. ann.* 1253, and Loccatelli, l. iv., c. viii.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LIBERATRIX OF ASSISI

THE first incident brings us close to 1230—an approximate date, for the Saint's biographer, Thomas of Celano, who transmits to us the details with such care and guarantees their authenticity, omits, as usual, to fix the epoch. In any case, it was the time when Frederick II., the powerful Emperor of Germany, the ungrateful pupil of Innocent III., entered on a campaign against the Roman Pontiffs, regardless of the oaths he had taken before the altars. Of unbridled as well as unscrupulous ambition, he aimed at nothing less than to plant his standard in the Eternal City, and to restore for his own advantage the universal dominion of the pagan Cæsars.

Already his German archers, seasoned warriors upon whom he could rely, had made themselves masters here and there in Italy of the fortified places. To swell their battalions, he had brought from Sicily a troop of twenty thousand Saracens, and given up to them at Nocera an old fortress, whence, as from an inaccessible aerie, these brigands dashed unexpectedly on the surrounding country to devastate it. He left the patrimony of St. Peter a prey to their fury, and at once they invaded Umbria, beginning with Spoleto. There were no kind of atrocities that



ASSISI.

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these barbarians, with a fanatical hatred of the Christian name, did not commit. They sacked the towns, pillaged the villages, set fire to the vineyards, and massacred the inhabitants. Ravaging in this way, a band of these miscreants arrived under the walls of St. Damian's.

The sight of the monastery excited their cupidity. In the middle of the night they scaled the outer walls, uttering frightful yells, and had reached the door of the cloister. On hearing the cries of the invaders, the terrified and weeping nuns fled for refuge to the bedside of their Mother, then lying seriously ill. Clare was undisturbed. In presence of the danger, she went straight to Him Who was her source of strength, as her ancestors went for their swords; and her strong support was the God of the Eucharist. Helped by two of her nuns, Sister Francesca of Colledimezzo and Sister Illuminata of Pisa, she rose, and had herself borne to her private oratory, where she was privileged to have the Blessed Sacrament.

Prostrate, face forward, on the floor, she thus addressed Our Lord: "O my Lord, will it please Thee, then, to abandon into the hands of these barbarians Thy loving handmaidens whom until now Thou hast nourished with Thy love? Do Thou, O Lord, guard them, and of Thy mercy, which I now humbly implore, save these poor virgins, whom I have not the power to save." Then a voice, as it were of a child, coming from the Blessed Sacrament, replied: "I shall always be your protection." Clare, with increased fervour and confidence, continued: "O most clement Lord, I pray Thee pro-

tect also this my country, which for love of Thee has so generously fed and assisted us." The same voice answered: "Thy country will have much to suffer, but My arm will defend it." Reassured by this promise, half rising and turning towards her companions, her face bathed in tears, she said to them: "Fear naught, my daughters; no ill will happen to thee, and nothing will occur to disturb thy peace. I promise it in the Name of the most clement Christ. Only have confidence."

Then, consoled and encouraged, she advanced with the ciborium* containing the Blessed Sacrament to an open window of the monastery, against which the infidels, who had scaled the inner wall which separated them from the cells, had already placed a ladder. At this sight a panic seized the Saracens. Those who mounted the wall, stricken with blindness, fell down precipitately, while the others, filled with a secret terror, fled. The convent and the city were thus saved from pillage.†

Four years afterwards Vitale d'Aversa, Lieutenant of Frederick II., came in turn to lay siege to Assisi, threatening to put its inhabitants to the sword if they did not surrender at discretion. In this extremity, Clare and her companions prostrated them-

* St. Bonaventure, quoted by Forti in the *Life of St. Clare*, described it as a silver pyx which was enclosed in an ivory casket. See Loccatelli, p. 340.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. iii. Cristofani's version (*History of St. Damian's*, c. xvi.) does not differ materially from that of Thomas of Celano. On September 19, 1832, they discovered in the walls of St. Clare's cell the miraculous ciborium in question. It is of ivory adorned with silver. See Loccatelli, Appendix, n. vi. The Manuscript 334 of the Sacro Convento mentions in the inventory of the relics of St. Clare the ciborium referred to here.

selves before the tabernacle, covering their heads with ashes, and prayed for the deliverance of their city. The next day (June 22, 1234) the besiegers, surprised by a sortie of the inhabitants, were suddenly seized with terror, and fled in disorder. Vitale d'Aversa himself perished miserably a short time afterwards. For the second time the seraphic city was saved. Let us add, to its credit, that it did not mistake the cause of such an unexpected deliverance. It did not attribute it to the wisdom of its chiefs nor to the valour of its soldiers, but to the merits and intercession of Favorino's daughter.*

These two prodigies are of incontestable authenticity. They have the authority of a contemporary whose judgments are above all discussion, Thomas of Celano, and are affirmed by secular writers,† as well as by historians of the Order. The first forms part of the Liturgical Office, and Christian artists have popularized it by representing St. Clare carrying the Blessed Sacrament. Neither can the second prodigy be an interpolation. In fact, it is found not only in ancient manuscripts : it is inscribed on another document, the value of which cannot be denied. This record is the popular memory. Every year a festival, at once religious and patriotic, revives and prolongs throughout the ages the remembrance of that happy event. On June 24 the whole city of Assisi gives itself up to rejoicing. The clergy, escorted by the magistrates, pious confraternities,

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita S. Clare*, c. iii. A letter of requisition from the assailants, preserved in the archives of the Sacro Convento, fixes the epoch of the siege at the year 1234.

† Cantu, *Universal History*, t. xxii.

and the masses, go processionally to St. Damian's. An authoritative voice reminds younger generations of the miraculous deliverance of the city and of the name of the liberatrix ; then all, kneeling, beg the seraphic virgin to still and always watch over them, over this corner of the land she loved so much during her life, and of which she ever remains the guardian angel. This commemorative ceremony, affirms a modern writer, a native of Assisi itself,* has survived all political changes, and annually repeats itself with a glow of enthusiasm which is inextinguishable, because it springs anew from a source always gushing—the gratitude of a whole city, of a whole people.

Paris is never weary of singing the praises of St. Geneviève, the conqueror of the Huns ; Orleans elevates to the skies the Blessed Joan of Arc, the liberatrix of France ; Assisi, too, has a good right to be proud of its heavenly protectress, and acclaim in her an envoy from God, a radiant virgin, a Christian Judith, one of those heroines who are an honour to their country because they have been its salvation.

There is nothing in history so interesting as these popular manifestations, nothing so attractive as the unforeseen appearance of the supernatural which occasioned them. And in the case of St. Clare, what varied benefits ! Providential succour, sudden cures, unexpected deliverance—in all these events, with which her name is mixed up, the Divine element is luminously conspicuous, and environs it with an aureola which has attracted and held us. We do

* Loccatelli, l. ii., c. vii.

not regret it : the Divine is always soul-raising. But, let us say at once, the greatest of all the miracles is the Saint herself—the Saint, with her interior beauties, the splendour of her virtues, and the merit of her victories. Oh, the touching spectacle !

CHAPTER XXV

THE SAINT

ST. BONAVENTURE has in a few words, in the legend of St. Francis, panegyricized the Umbrian heroine. "Virgin God-beloved," he writes, "she has exhaled the perfumes of a spring flower and shone like the morning star."*

What truths are contained in that poetic tribute ! Clare has shone in the midst of her contemporaries by superiority of mind no less than by that of rank. But it is not on account of these natural gifts and advantages, so easily abused, that we claim to erect a pedestal in her honour. Her virtues, her virginal purity, unbounded humility, a love of God carried to heroism—such are her real titles to our veneration, because it was in that way she ascended to the pinnacle of moral greatness and remains in possession of a glory untarnished by time. Let us explain ourselves.

There are not wanting nowadays "intellectuals" who, repeating the argument of the humanists of the fifteenth century, exalt to excess all that springs from Nature, while they tax virtue with "meanness and moral depression." Nothing could be more unfounded than their pretensions, nothing more odious than their aspersions. "No doubt, from the solitary fact that he is endowed with reason and

* *Vita S. Francisci*, c. iv.

freedom, man is capable of himself of working some good, and we like, even in the ages of paganism, to meet with noble examples and salutary lessons. But Christianity has purified, ennobled, and transfigured those moral virtues, mingled with so many vices, without ignoring what is good and generous in Nature ; it has raised it above earth, to seek in God Himself the principle and end of our moral activity. On the purely human order it has engrafted another order of ideas and sentiments—the supernatural order. It has turned man towards God, that man may receive from that immortal Source the radiation of grace which illumines his life, penetrates and transforms it. Hence, our acts and faculties have taken a higher direction, and an upward movement of our whole being towards the infinite is effected.”*

It could not be better expressed. Sanctity is an upward movement of our whole being, of our intelligence by faith, of our will by grace, of our heart by love—an upward movement which is consummated in the meeting and perfect union of the Creator and the creature ; hence it requires a struggle, continuous effort, victory. This struggle our modern humanists have not the courage to undertake, and it is their condemnation. This victory a woman who did not pride herself on being lettered has achieved, and that is what constitutes her merit, what raises her to such a height, and completely justifies the honours and eulogiums the Church has decreed to her.

Thomas of Celano, in his psychological study of the seraphic virgin, has in two other anecdotes depicted to the life some of those interior struggles.

* Mgr. Freppel, t. v., sermon on Sanctity.

Let us listen to him, for there is nothing finer than a soul victorious over itself, particularly when it relates to a generous soul like that of the Umbrian heroine.

It will be remembered that the lay Sisters were commissioned to go and quest outside the food necessary for the nuns' subsistence. When returning to the monastery, bending beneath their precious burden, Clare went to meet them, washed their feet, and waited on them at table. One day, when she was performing this pious office in regard to one of them, and was about to kiss her feet, the humble lay Sister, thinking it was too much, abruptly drew back her foot. She did it so awkwardly, remarks an old chronicler, that she struck the Abbess full in the face. Clare did not exhibit the least emotion. Preserving that serenity of soul and smiling air which added such a charm to familiar intercourse with her, she gently caught the foot again and kissed it slowly.*

The incident is of the simplest, but at bottom one of the most suggestive. What an empire over self does it not denote ! And what partial victories, as a necessary preparation for what we have related, does it not leave us to surmise ! For the pious Abbess was proud by nature, and the blood of the Scefî which flowed in her veins sometimes showed itself in sallies or vivacity of character. Her reply to Gregory IX. supplies a proof.

That Pontiff, thoroughly adopting St. Francis's idea on the subject of the relations of the Friars Minor with St. Damian's, feared that too frequent visits on the part of the latter, even under colour of spiritual direction, might end in changing the spirit

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.

of both houses. To cut short the danger, he forbade all the Portiuncula religious from going to the monastery of St. Damian's without the express authorization of the Holy See, imposing severe penalties on transgressors. Clare had too much respect for the acts of the Supreme Pastor not to submit, but her first movement was to protest, and in her own manner, against an interdict which deprived her and her companions of the happiness of hearing the word of God. She assembled the Brother-questors, whom the successors of St. Francis, faithful to the recommendations of the Seraphic Patriarch, placed at her service. After thanking them for the past, she dismissed them, saying : " Since they have taken from us the food of the soul, let them also suppress those who beg for us food for the body." The blood of the Scefî in the venerable Abbess's veins showed itself. Gregory IX. was not offended at this sally. He recognized in it the expression of a mother who feels herself bound to provide for her children's wants, and—here one sees his affection and fatherly condescension towards St. Clare—revoking his decree, he restored to the Poor Ladies the preachers whose teaching they knew so well how to appreciate.*

It cannot be too often repeated—the Saints are not born Saints : they become so. Clare, like all the children of Adam, had to fight not only against the world and the powers of hell, but also against herself, against those bad tendencies each of us has within himself, and against that inconstancy, that changeability of sentiments, which is the stumbling-

* *Vita S. Claræ*, c. v.

block of those whose virtues are not very solid. It was only after a continuous and lifelong struggle that she secured the definite triumph in her heart of grace over the weaknesses of nature.*

Higher than all the cries of nature sounded in her ears the *sequere Me* she had heard at the hour of her religious consecration. She followed Christ, going at one time to the school of the Crib, at another time to that of Nazareth, oftener still to that of Calvary, and could say in all sincerity: "To imitate Jesus and Jesus crucified is my law; it is also all my happiness."† She contemplated, she adored, she imitated—so humble, according to her historians, that only after the lapse of three years she consented to assume the title of Abbess; so modest that she was only once seen to raise her eyelids to ask the Pope's blessing, and then only could one see the colour of her eyes, blue as heaven; so charitable that she called herself, and really made herself, "the servant of the servants of God"; so poor that she was destitute of everything, and abandoned

* "To every man, however holy he may be, there always remains some imperfection, because he has been drawn from nothingness; so that we do no injury to the Saints when, in recounting their virtues, we relate their sins and defects; but, on the contrary, those who write their lives seem, for this reason, to do a great injury to mankind by concealing the sins and imperfections of the Saints, under pretence of honouring them, not referring to the commencement of their lives for fear of diminishing the esteem of their sanctity. . . . All the great Saints, when writing the lives of other Saints, have told us their faults and imperfections candidly, and thought, as was right, that by this means they should render as much service to God, and even to the Saints, as by recounting their virtues" (St. Francis de Sales, *Consoling Thoughts*, p. 274).

† "Pauperi Crucifixo conformari" (*Vita S. Clare*, c. ii.).

herself wholly to the care of Providence, like the birds of the air ; in fine, so singularly solicitous of pleasing her immortal Spouse that she counted as nothing all that did not tend to His glory.

At night, while her companions took their brief repose, she prolonged her vigils, and then, alone, prostrate on her knees before the tabernacle, she gave free course to the transports of her devotion. Going in spirit to the heights of Calvary, she joined her tears to the tears of the Redeemer, and never wearied of offering herself a pure victim to the Eternal Father for the conversion of peoples—the holocaust of her senses by penitence and prayer, and the still better holocaust of her heart by the outpourings of her love. When the hour for Matins came, she lit the lamps, gently awakened her companions, and awaited them in choir to resume prayer with them.*

In the daytime she returned to the school of Nazareth, to her functions as Abbess ; then to the textile work in which she excelled, as may be judged by what remains to us. She spun, embroidered, made corporals, amices, and albs to distribute among the villages of Umbria ; attentive, above all, in clothing as well as consoling Him Whom love has stripped of His glory—Jesus in the Host, Jesus poor and abandoned in His churches. Never idle, her hand at work, her heart in God, by one of those thoughts faith suggests to us, she ennobled the lowliest occupations as well as the highest functions.†

Was she ill, stricken with one of those fevers

* *Vita S. Claræ*, c. iii.

† “Carne in imis, mente in excelsis” (*Vita S. Claræ*, c. iii.) ; “Filabat . . .” (c. iv.).

which, since 1228, secretly undermined her? She had herself raised on her pallet, and continued none the less the work begun the day before. Was she taking a little rest? The bare ground or at most a handful of vine-branches served her for a bed, the trunk of a tree taking the place of a pillow. And yet she reproached herself with all this softness, regretting she could not follow closer Him Who had not whereon to lay His head. She even went too far in the ways of corporal mortification, retrenching vegetables as a luxury during the Lenten or Advent fasts, contenting herself then with a little bread and a glass of water, and even depriving herself of all food on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. It was beyond her strength. Her two spiritual directors, St. Francis and Don Guido, Bishop of Assisi, seeing her wasting away, imposed upon her the obligation of not passing a day without taking some refreshment. She submitted, rightly deeming obedience better than sacrifice.*

Such appears to us, by the light of history, the daughter of the Scefî—always true to herself, in the midst of an ever-increasing seraphic fervour; humble without debasement; high-spirited without ever being haughty; gentle and firm; pure and immaculate; a voluntary recluse and a dominant personality in her time; destitute of everything, and at the same time the freest and most joyful of creatures. Joyful! It was the very seal of her sanctity, remarks her historian. "She had always a smiling expression, her heart was always joyful;"†

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. iii.

† "Servabat vultus festivos et hilares" (*Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*).

and she communicated to all who approached her the peace and joy that filled her heart, a joy which was never disturbed.

Whence did she derive this interior gladness, she who was weaned from all sensible consolations ? It was from the springs of living water religion opens up for us, in the reading of the Gospel, in profound meditation on the truths of faith, in Communions made with careful preparation ; or, again, in those devotions to the Crib, the Passion, and the Eucharist which the great revivalist of those times, St. Francis of Assisi, had awakened in the minds of the faithful. In all these pious practices she only sought one thing, or, better, only one single Being—the Conqueror of death, the Vanquisher of hell—and, finding Him, hearing His voice, her heart was glad, and, like Mary Magdalen on the morning of the Resurrection, she sang to Him a canticle of gratitude and adoration : *Rabboni*.

But were these spiritual rejoicings only the fruit of grace and a conscience at peace ? Had they not another mode of Divine action as their principle ? In other words, was not the humble recluse of St. Damian's admitted to the delights of contemplation, to that already beatifying face-to-face vision in which the Creator deigns to manifest Himself and speak to His creature, to instruct and console her ? And was it not, in coming down from this Thabor, she bore on her brow that ray of glory which dazzled the eyes of her companions ? Foundress, wonder-worker, Saint—was she, then, also an ecstatic ? The question calls for an answer, and this answer we shall ask from contemporary documents.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ECSTATIC

YES, St. Clare was truly an ecstatic, for the same reason as, although in a less degree than, Friar Giles, her contemporary, or St. Teresa, the Carmelite reformer. Have we not already seen how, since 1212, she dispelled St. Francis's doubts as to his vocation, and urged him back to the sphere of the apostolate? then how, at the time of the Saracen invasion, Our Lord Himself deigned to console her and undertake her defence? In the interval and in the sequel she had other supernatural communications.

The *Fioretti* has described for us some of those mystical favours. There is none who has not read the scene of the miraculous meal, which we have previously translated, and that of the midnight Mass, when St. Clare assisted in spirit at the Christmas celebration in the Basilica of St. Francis.

Being once very ill, so that she could not go to say the Office in the church with the other nuns, the solemnity of Christ's Nativity occurring, all the others went to Matins, and she remained in bed, discontented that she could not go with them and have some spiritual consolation. But Jesus Christ, her Spouse, not wishing to leave her thus disconsolate, caused her to be miraculously carried to the

church of St. Francis, and to be present at the whole morning Office and midnight Mass, and, besides, to receive Holy Communion, and then to be carried back to her bed. The nuns, returning to St. Clare when the Office in St. Damian's was over, said to her: "O Mother, Sister Clare, what great consolation we have had on this holy Nativity! Would that it had pleased God that you had been with us!" And St. Clare answered: "I give thanks and praise to Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, my dearest Sisters and daughters, because at every solemnity of this most holy night, and more even than you, I had great consolation in my soul, since, by the procuring of my Father St. Francis and by the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I have been present in the church of my venerable Father St. Francis, and with my bodily and mental ears have heard the whole Office and the organ playing, as is done there, and there myself have received Holy Communion. Wherefore, for such a favour done me, rejoice and thank Our Lord Jesus Christ."*

These narratives, written with an inimitable charm, vividly depict an epoch fond of the symbolic and marvellous, and will always delight appreciative minds. If criticism rejects them, we have other sources of information which deserve entire credence. First, there are Clare's companions, whose sworn depositions have been inscribed in the Acts for the canonization process. Then there is Thomas of Celano, the official historian of the Order, a firm and judicious mind, who cannot be charged with ignorance or credulity. So many eye or ear witnesses who,

* *Fioretti*, c. xxxv.

evoked from their graves, rise up one after the other to affirm, without emphasis or circumlocution, not only the reality, but the frequency, of the mystical operations which they have seen. Let us hear them.

Here, first of all, is Sister Benvenuta of Perugia, one of the Saint's first companions. "I have seen our Mother," she says, "completely transfigured on coming from prayer. How beautiful she was! Her face was environed with a nimbus of light, and I could hardly endure the brightness of her countenance."* "In the middle of a sermon, while we were in choir," declares in turn Sister Agnes Oportula, "I have seen Our Lord appear to her in the form of a child radiant with grace and beauty. He smiled upon her with infinite tenderness."† "I have seen our Mother in ecstasy on the 1st of May, Feast of St. Philip and St. James," says again a third speaker, Sister Frances of Collemezzo.‡ "How describe her happiness? She bore the Infant Jesus in her arms and talked familiarly with Him."

There is nothing so touching as these depositions, impressed with a tone of sincerity which does not deceive. The language of Thomas of Celano is not less positive and convincing. Here are the terms in which he corroborates the evidence of the nuns of St. Damian's: "The humble Abbess tried in vain, but she could not succeed in entirely concealing the gifts of God. The sheaves of light or flames which came from her face, certain transports

* *Acts for the Process of Canonization, apud Wadding, ad ann. 1251.*

† *Wadding, ad ann. 1213.*

‡ She mentions the day without designating the year. See *Wadding, ad ann. 1213.*

of fervour which she could not repress, certain more melodious notes—all these exterior and visible signs, despite her, betrayed the mystery of the Divine operations, and in view of this spectacle her companions were rapt in admiration.”* Then he relates at length one of those ecstasies, the circumstances and duration of which had doubtless more vividly impressed the Sisters’ imaginations.

“It was,” he says, “on the morning of Holy Thursday.† Clare, after assisting at the Offices of the day, retired to her cell, to there meditate more at her ease and taste all the bitterness of the Passion. Passing over in her mind the mournful scenes of that day—the bloody sweat in the garden of Gethsemani, the betrayal by Judas, then the scourging, the crowning with thorns, and the crucifixion—she felt a faintness analogous to that of St. Francis on Monte Vernia. She had to seek a support, and rested on her pallet. At that moment the Spirit of God descended upon her, and suddenly she entered into a rapture which suspended the action of the senses. Motionless, half raised upon her bed, she had her eyes fixed upon an invisible Being Whose beauty captivated her heart and absorbed all the powers of her soul. At nightfall one of her nuns, surprising her in that state, did not dare to approach, and withdrew without saying anything to anybody, for fear of disturbing the work of the Creator. The next morning, finding the Abbess in the same position, she again withdrew, for the same reason

* “Mirabuntur . . . clariorem solito faciem apparere ” (*Vita S. Clare*, c. iii.).

† He mentions the day, but not the year.

as on the night before. At last, at night, she was seized with fear, and, recalling the recommendations of the Seraphic Patriarch, she went up, lamp in hand, to the Foundress's cell. 'Mother,' she said to her, 'have you forgotten that St. Francis enjoined upon you not to pass any day without partaking at least of some slight refecton?' At the name of St. Francis the ecstatic at once returned to herself; but, not suspecting the duration of her ecstasy, 'Wherefore this lamp?' she asked the religious. 'Is it not yet day?' 'Mother,' replied the religious, 'do you not perceive that a day and a night have elapsed, and that we have entered on Good Friday night?' Then the Abbess comprehended all; but fearing to divulge, without a motive, the secrets of the great King, and remembering how carefully the Patriarch of Assisi concealed the stigmata in his hands, she contented herself with saying to her companion: 'O sleep a thousand times blessed! O favour long desired! . . . But thou, my daughter, keep this mystery to thyself, and don't speak of it to anyone as long as I am in this world.' '*

What passed in that intimate dialogue between the Creator and the creature? No one will ever know; the Saint carried the secret with her into the grave. What we do know is that to the delights of ecstasy, the inebriations of love, succeeded the most diabolical temptations. And one need not be astonished. It is a law of the supernatural order, we wrote in the Life of St. Francis of Assisi, that when God admits a soul to the joys of His intimate communications, He also permits

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. vi.

the angels of darkness to draw nigh to it to tempt it—a rigorous but perfectly wise law, which makes combat the indispensable element of victory, widens the field of human liberty, and has for its object to re-establish in the heart of man, by purifying it, the equilibrium destroyed by sin.*

The ecstatic of Umbria did not escape this decree of Providence. After the beatific visits of her brethren the heavenly seraphs, she had to endure assaults from hell. “Terrible assaults,” remarks our old chronicler. The angel of darkness, exhibiting himself under a visible form and dissembling his ugliness, never ceased to lay snares for her, sparing neither seductions nor threats, nor even violent treatment, to turn her aside from the service of God. One day he left her bruised from blows and bleeding on the ground. Another time, assuming an air of commiseration, he said to her: “If thou continuest to weep in that way thou wilt become blind.” “Whoever contemplates God cannot become blind,” the Saint responded. And he beat a retreat, but to return to the charge with renewed fury. “Weep, weep!” he cried to her, chuckling, “and soon thou wilt be seized with intolerable pains.” “Silence!” quickly replied the Saint. “One does not suffer when one serves God.” And the demon fled, ashamed at being vanquished by a woman.†

Did angels of light in turn draw near the heroic Abbess to console her? Perhaps; for we do not

* See seventh edition in French and third edition in English.

† *Vita S. Clare*, c. iii.

know the number and extent of those supernatural favours she was pleased to communicate to us. In any case, it was likewise in the midst of a marvellous vision, crowning all others—as we shall relate a little further on—it was in the midst of a group of virgins and of angelic symphonies that she quitted this valley of tears to take her flight towards the city of peace.

But it is time to draw from the mystical phenomena set forth in this chapter, and in the whole course of the volume, the conclusions growing out of them. It is, first of all, that the Abbess of St. Damian's deserves the name of ecstatic, and that, consoled and consolatrix in turn, she was more than once the instrument of Divine mercy in regard to her contemporaries. It is also, and above all, that she was a Saint, and a great Saint; for, never losing sight of this fundamental principle, that virtue does not consist in spiritual delights, even of the highest order, but in effort, duty, and sacrifice, she knew how to turn everything, visions and ecstasies as well as diabolical obsessions, to the advancement of her soul and the triumph of good over evil. She profited by light and ecstasies to return to herself, to shrink into her nothingness, to detach herself from earthly things and to attach herself more tenaciously to the Eternal Beauty, seen face to face in contemplation. She profited none the less by diabolical obsessions and temptations to become more watchful over herself, more attentive to the movements of grace, more resolute in the pursuit of her vocation and the complete accomplishment of her providential mission.

“Admirable woman!” says Thomas of Celano,* and with reason—admirable woman, not on account of her ecstasies or miracles, which are the work of God, but on account of the generosity of her sacrifices, her patience under crosses, and all those acts inspired by Divine charity or fraternal devotedness, which are the work and merit of the creature.

Souls, like flowers, are known by their perfume. It was the Saint, young, enthusiastic, but above all devoured with a hungering for sacrifices, that the penetrating glance of the Poverello discerned. It was the Saint of the seraphic flight that in turn the great Pontiffs who called themselves Innocent III., Honorius III., and Gregory IX. admired, blessed, and protected. It was the Saint who herself discloses the treasures of her heart when, reaching the end of her course and casting a backward glance at her childhood, her vocation, her struggles, and her sufferings, sees therein only God’s benefits, feels bound to loudly proclaim her gratitude, and dictates her will, which is only one long act of thanksgiving and at the same time an apologia of evangelical detachment.† It was the Saint, in fine, the dying Saint, the Saint with the halo of merits and victories, the martyr of penitence, martyr of love, whom the most august personages came to visit and wished to see, whom Pope Innocent IV. himself desired to hear.

* *Vita S. Clarae*, c. i.

† She dictated her will towards the close of her life, probably before the Bull of Innocent IV., to which she makes no allusion. The will is reproduced in its entirety in the *Textus Originales*, pp. 273-280. See Appendix.

CHAPTER XXVII

DEFINITE TRIUMPH (1250-1253)

WE have spoken of visits to St. Clare when dying. In 1252 she was stretched on her poor pallet, exhausted by suffering, burning with fever, her strength spent, and having nothing more than a breath of life in her. The angel of death seemed hovering over her head, and the victim herself, like all God's elect, seized with the sublime home-sickness for heaven, sighed for the close of her exile. Perfectly resigned to the will of God, she was, however, anxious about her mission as Foundress. Would she leave her task unfinished, and die before obtaining from the Holy See, along with the ratification of the Rule of 1224, the definite and solemn concession of the "privilege" of seraphic poverty, that privilege coveted for forty years? She was praying, and hoping against all hope, for the times were difficult. Frederick II., anathematized by the Œcumenical Council of Lyons (1245), took revenge by invading the Italian Peninsula, and Pope Innocent IV. was obliged to prolong his sojourn in France.

But—oh, delicate attention of Providence!—at that moment a Benedictine nun of St. Paul's, who had long retained an affectionate remembrance of

the seraphic virgin, had a vision, and hastened to send the following message to St. Damian's: "Sisters, cease your lamentations. Your Mother will not quit this world until the Lord shall have appeared to her with His disciples."* She meant by that the Vicar of Christ, with his ecclesiastical following. It is Thomas of Celano who narrates this vision and guarantees its meaning to us. We may take it on his word.

A visit from the Pope ! Humanly speaking, the thing seemed impossible, and, in fact, was so. But what is impossible to the Master of the Universe, when the honour of His Church or the salvation of souls is at stake ? An unexpected event—one of those tragic events which change the face of empires—was going to make the prophecy realizable.

In 1250 they suddenly learnt that Frederick II., the terror of Italy and the incorrigible persecutor of the Popes, stopped in the course of his exploits, was dead in Fiorenzuola, having met his death in an unexplained manner.† Italy was free, and the Papacy could breathe. Innocent IV. availed of this conjuncture to return to his States. He quitted, after thanking it, the hospitable city of Lyons, which had guarded the sessions of the

* *Vita S. Claræ*, c. vi. The vision is also related in detail by Vincenzo Loccatelli (*Vita di Santa Chiara*, l. v., c. i., p. 240) and Tommaso Loccatelli Paolucci (*Vita Breve*, part i., c. xi., p. 114). The latter assumes it was Our Lady who appeared to one of the pious Sisterhood of S. Angelo di Panzo, where Clare and Agnes abode before going to St. Damian's.—TRANSLATOR.

† The last moments of Frederick II. still remain an enigma. Among historians, some affirm that he was smothered by his son Manfred ; others assert that he died absolved and reconciled.

Council, recrossed the Alps, and proceeded towards Genoa, his native place. In 1252 he fixed his residence in Perugia, and it was thus that events, guided by an invisible hand, were gradually leading up towards the end we foresee.

In the Pontifical suite figured a personage of high distinction, who was going to be the instrument of the designs of Providence. It was Cardinal Rinaldo Conti, Bishop of Ostia, nephew of Gregory IX., animated, by his example, with a tender devotion for the Patriarch of Assisi, and a paternal affection for the whole Franciscan family, of which he was the Cardinal Protector. Informed of the aggravated sufferings of the Umbrian reformer, he immediately set out for Assisi to visit and console the nuns, "of whom he was the defender and friend."* Let us follow him, for it is he who is going to procure for the dying Clare the supreme consolation of her life, the favour she had begged for forty years—the right of living and dying under the shadow of her chosen standard, the flag of evangelical poverty. It is he who, by his procedure, is going to ensure the definite triumph of the Franciscan idea.

On the morning of September 8 the gates of the monastery of St. Damian opened to him. One may imagine the eagerness of the poor recluses, the surprise and joy of the invalid, and the edification of the Cardinal at the sight of such virtue. He delivered a touching exhortation to the Sisters, gave Communion with his own hands to their venerated Mother, and conversed with her on the

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. vi.

needs and difficulties of her Institute. "Bless me, bless all your daughters!" said the Saint to him at the moment of leave-takings. "But I conjure you, in the name of the interest you take in us, add thereto another favour: plead our cause before the Holy Father, and beg him, entreat him, to authenticate and confirm by a rescript under his own hand our privilege of the most high poverty." "I promise you," replied the Cardinal, not without an emotion easy to understand.* And he kept his word. Hardly had he returned to Perugia, when he presented to the Sovereign Pontiff the humble request of the Poor Ladies, obtained his full consent, and on September 16 he addressed to the Abbess of St. Damian's, in the name of the Universal Pastor, a letter containing the Rule of 1224, and confirming in perpetuity, conformable to the wishes of our Saint, "the privilege of the most high poverty."† Nothing more was required than the Pope's personal signature and the more solemn formality of the Bulls. Both were not slow to come.

The year following, continues our old chronicler—that is to say, in 1253—Innocent IV. came in person to Assisi. He wished, he said, to recommend the Bark of Peter and its pilot to the prayers of the disciple and coadjutrix of St. Francis. He wished also to have the satisfaction of contemplating with his own eyes her whose name and virtues were known to all Italy.

The interview was most moving. Clare, com-

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. vi.

† This letter is contained in the Bull of Innocent IV., which will be referred to at the close of the chapter.

forted by this august visit, felt revived. After kissing the Pontiff's hand, she also asked to kiss his feet. He acceded with good grace to such a pious desire, put his foot upon a stool, and the invalid could thus pay to the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, marks of her respectful and filial veneration.*

Was it on this occasion she renewed the petition of which Cardinal Rinaldo Conti made himself the interpreter? And did she avail of the presence and amiable condescension of the Head of Catholicity to beg him to extend his blessing to the whole Congregation to all time? We are willingly inclined to think so, for a little farther on we shall hear Innocent IV. declare positively that he accedes to the petition and to previous entreaties. Thomas of Celano does not refer directly nor remotely to the events and to the definite approval of the Rule of 1224, but he collects with pious care the characteristic points or anecdotes, and does not omit to relate the incident which terminated the interview of 1253.

The Pontiff was getting ready to take leave of the Damianites. "Holy Father," said the invalid to him, with an angelic smile, "grant me, before going, the plenary indulgence and remission of all my sins." "Would to Heaven, my daughter," he replied, "that my soul had not more need than thine of the Divine forgiveness!" He extended his hand to absolve and bless her, and, if tradition is to be believed, he gave the Saint, in memory of his visit, a valuable ring, which, after Clare's death, was

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. vi.

deposited in the treasury of the Poor Clares of Assisi.

Proceedings like those of Innocent IV. are rare in history, even in the history of Saints. Clare felt its full value, so, when the Pontifical suite withdrew, she could not refrain from openly giving expression to the gratitude with which her heart was overflowing. "My daughters," she said to her companions, "praise the Lord, praise Him along with me; for I have received to-day two graces alongside which all the splendours of earth and sky are nothing—this morning, my Master and my King in Holy Communion; this evening, the visit of him who is His representative on earth. Oh, happiness!"*

This happiness, however, had been incomplete without the Pontifical diploma which serves as an epilogue to the interview. On August 9 Innocent IV. himself brought to St. Damian's the reply to the petition of the Poor Ladies, the Bull *Solet Annuere*, which is the charter of the Poor Clares, as the Bull of Honorius III. is for the Friars Minor. Clare kissed the seal of the fisherman, and could read, with her eyes half blinded by the gift of tears, the text of the document:

"*Innocent, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God:*

"To his well-beloved daughters in Jesus Christ.

Clare, Abbess, and the other Sisters of the monastery of St. Damian at Assisi, health and the Apostolic benediction.

"The Apostolic See is accustomed to satisfy pious wishes and to accord its approval to just petitions.

* *Vita S. Claræ, loc. cit.*

It, therefore, having been humbly requested on your behalf that We should confirm with our Apostolic authority that Rule of life according to which you should live in common in unity of spirit, vowing the loftiest poverty, already given to you by the Blessed Francis, and spontaneously received by you, and which our venerable Brother, the Bishop of Ostia and Velletri, thought worthy of being approved, We, inclined to grant your pious supplications, confirm with our Apostolic authority what is contained in the letters of the said Bishop, lately addressed to you, holding likewise as valid and acceptable what was done by him in this regard, and solemnly sanctioning again by the present writing, wherein We have caused to be inserted, word for word, the text of his said letters, as follows :

“ ‘ *Rinaldo, by the Grace of God Bishop of Ostia and Velletri :*

“ ‘ To his dearest Mother and daughter in Jesus Christ, Clare, Abbess of St. Damian in Assisi, and to her Sisters present and future, health and paternal benediction.

“ ‘ Since you, beloved daughters in Christ, despising every pomp and pleasure, and following in the footsteps of the Redeemer Himself and His most holy Mother, chose to live as an enclosed body, and to follow the Lord in the greatest poverty ; therefore, that you may enjoy full liberty of spirit therein, we, praising your holy purpose with goodwill and paternal affection, accord the fullest approval to your holy wishes and desires. Moved

by your humble petitions, we now declare, with Pontifical authority and ours, that form of life and custom of holy union and most high poverty which the Blessed Father St. Francis gave you verbally and in writing to observe, confirmed in perpetuity to you and to all who shall succeed you in your monastery, invested now with the authenticity of the present writing.' "

Then follows the entire text of the Rule of 1224, and, as a final sanction, this imposing formula, which is only employed in Bulls :

" Let it not, then, be permissible to anyone to infringe this letter of confirmation or contravene it with rash temerity. If anyone should dare to attempt it, let him know that he will thereby incur the anger of Almighty God and of the Blessed Peter and Paul, His Apostles.

" Given at Assisi on the ninth of the month of August, in the eleventh year of our Pontificate."*

The venerable Abbess was inebriated with joy and happiness. At last she possessed that diploma so much desired. She covered it with kisses, moistened it with her tears, and pressed it to her heart,†

* *Textus Originales*, pp. 49-75. The Bull is of 1253. The autograph is one of the treasures of the Poor Clares of Assisi.

† At the end of the document a contemporary had written : " St. Clare, dying, held it in her hands and several times kissed it with devotion." The inscription was effaced, but in 1894, Signor Cozza-Luzzi revived it by the usual method, and communicated it to the Pontifical Archæological Academy, of which he is President. See *Annales Franciscaines*, 1894-95, p. 323.

as the soldier does his conquering sword. It was indeed a victory, one of those blessed hours which decide the future. Her flag, after being forty years on the breach, was now honoured, and her great "privilege" officially recognized by Apostolic authority. No event could more move the Congregation. The monastery of St. Damian was given up to rejoicing, and the bones of the Founder, St. Francis, must have leaped in their stone shrine.

Clare begged the Pope to sign with his own hand the order for the execution of the Bull, which he did on the spot, with perfect good grace.* There were tears in his eyes as he left.

The Foundress could now intone her *Nunc Dimittis*. Her task was ended, nobly accomplished from one end to the other, and her works—the reformation of manners seriously established among women, and consequently at the domestic hearth; Christendom enriched with a legion of praying virgins; the privilege of seraphic poverty enshrined among the gems of the religious life—her works were there to bear witness to her activity as well as her perseverance and zeal in the service of God. The time of struggle and labours had passed; the hour of rewards was about to strike for her.

* It is again to Signor Cozza-Luzzi we owe the knowledge of this detail. He has brought to light at once the Pope's words and the contemporary inscription (*Annales Franciscaines, loc. cit.*).

CHAPTER XXVIII

DEATH AND OBSEQUIES (1253)

THOMAS OF CELANO has devoted to the last moments and death of the heroine of penitence a page intensely moving, in which the narrator disappears behind the friend who weeps. We are going to analyze this narrative. May we do so without detracting from it.

Clare's seventeen last days were only one uninterrupted suffering, but suffering bravely accepted and singularly lightened by thoughts of heaven. Her companions surrounded her, heartbroken, plunged in grief at the thought of the fatal ending imminent. They deprived themselves of food and sleep; all wept and mourned, Sister Agnes Scefì still more than the others, breaking out into sobbing. Had she then hastened from Florence, after an interval of thirty years, only to receive a last farewell, followed by a never-ending separation? "Mother, O Mother," she repeated, "don't leave us!" "Cease weeping," she replied. "We must die—it is the will of God—but the separation will not be for long. Thou wilt soon follow me, not without first receiving great consolations."*

It was wonderful to see the holy Abbess on her

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. vi.

pallet, wonderful to hear her. The body was in the last extremity, but the mind still retained all its vigour, all its lucidity—a thing the more astonishing as during those seventeen days she could take no food “except that of the soul”—that is to say, we presume, the Viaticum of the dying, the Blessed Eucharist. With admirable courage and presence of mind, she consoled her companions, received with kindness the strangers who came to visit her, Cardinals, prelates, or people, and threw her whole soul into one of those burning expressions familiar to her : “Love God, serve God—everything is in that.”*

It was a lamp giving its most brilliant light before going out, a star lighting up the horizon before disappearing. What fire and what brilliancy ! When Father Rinaldo, her confessor, exhorted her to be patient, “Father,” she replied, with complete liberty of spirit, “since our lamented Father, St. Francis, showed me the infinite perfection and loveliness of Christ, no sickness has seemed grievous to me, no pain too severe, no penance too hard.”†

Alongside her, besides Father Rinaldo, were the venerable companions of the Patriarch of Assisi, those zealous observers of the Rule, those truly spiritual men whom she loved on that account : Brother Leo, “the sheep of the good God” ; Brother Angelo Tancredi, the former Knight of Rieti ; Brother Juniper, “the favourite of the Most High.” She begged them to read to her the Passion of Our Lord.

* *Vita S. Claræ*, c. vi.

† “Nulla poena molesta, nulla poenitentia gravis, nulla infirmitas dura fuit” (*Vita S. Claræ*, c. vi.).

Then, perceiving Brother Juniper, she showed how glad it made her. "Have you nothing new to tell us of God?" she asked him. And he, without a pause, spoke from his heart, that furnace of Divine love, some burning words which rejoiced and comforted her.*

Time, however, was passing. The hour of the eternal nuptials was near; the mystical bride was ready. Then she collects herself, glances over the past, discovers therein nothing but graces and favours, and with a loud voice praises Him Who is their Author. She then turns towards her daughters, bequeaths to them her most precious treasure, seraphic poverty, blesses the bystanders, the Friars, all the nuns in her monastery, and includes in her blessing all her spiritual daughters, all who shall enrol themselves under her standard throughout the ages. Those about her burst into sobs. Brother Angelo of Rieti tries to console the Sisters; Brother Leo, mute with grief, lets his tears fall on the pallet of the dying Saint.

After some moments of solemn silence, the Abbess murmurs in a low tone: "Go, my soul, go in peace; for thou hast an excellent Guide to show thee the way. He Who created thee has also sanctified thee; He loves thee, and has not ceased to watch over thee with all a mother's tenderness for the only son of her love. And Thou, Lord, be blessed for having created me." "To whom are you speaking?" asks one of the Sisters. "To my soul," she replies; and, shortly after, turning towards another religious, she adds: "Seest thou, my daughter, the King of

* *Vita S. Clarae, loc. cit.*

Glory, Whom I am contemplating ?” And the eyes of this nun are opened to the mysteries of the higher sphere. She sees a troop of virgins advancing, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. One of these virgins eclipses and dominates all the others ; her diadem, set with precious stones, is more resplendent, and her whole being sheds a calm, bright light, which fills the whole cell. The Queen of Angels—for it is she—leans towards the holy Abbess, gathers her soul as one gathers a ripe fruit, and reascends with her attendant virgins and the newly elect to the abode of eternal happiness.*

Thus died, if that be death, the Foundress of the Poor Ladies, in the inebriating delights of an ecstasy, amid the blessings of Mary, the symphonies of angels, and the acclamations of the choir of virgins. “ In the twinkling of an eye,” remarks Thomas of Celano, “ all was transformed.”

No more tears or sufferings. The soul was drinking deeply at the sources of life, and seeing face to face Him Whom alone she had loved in this world ; the body, henceforth inert, “ like a tent folded up,”† was marked with the sign of the glorious resurrection, and the cell itself, still redolent of a heavenly and penetrating perfume, was to become an eloquent witness of the past, a grave teaching, and a source of consolation for the future.

It was on the morning of August 11, 1253, twenty-seven years after the passing of St. Francis, took place this blessed death. Clare was in the sixtieth year of her age and the forty-second of her religious consecration. An hour afterwards the whole

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. vi.

† *Ibid.*

city of Assisi was astir. Clergy and laity thronged to St. Damian's, and from every mouth came the same cry : " Clare is a Saint ! We have another Saint ! " In the Middle Ages they were persuaded that those Christian heroes called Saints were at the same time the best friends of the people, and their remains a powerful protection to the cities that retained them. It is this conviction, grounded on thousands of favours as well as on gifts of faith, which explains the sequel of the story and the enthusiasm of the deceased's fellow-citizens. The Podesta arranged with the Bishop and the Sovereign Pontiff the measures necessary under the circumstances to safeguard the mortal remains of the Abbess from a surprise, a seizure, or a profanation. The municipal archers kept watch round the monastery of St. Damian. The body next day, August 12, was brought within the ramparts and deposited in the Church of St. George, given up to the Damianites by the Canons of St. Rufino. The Hospital of St. George was transformed into a convent, and the Sisters came to take their places, like vigilant sentinels, nigh the tomb of their Foundress, which they were to guard. The Poor Ladies could not oppose the execution of a project so highly approved of by all the authorities of the city and tending so manifestly to their Mother's glorification.

The obsequies were celebrated on the morning of August 12, with a pomp and in the midst of a multitude which recalled the funeral of St. Francis. They were attended with even more *éclat*, for, by a superaddition of exceptional honour, Innocent IV. himself presided over the ceremonies. The con-

temporary chronicle is careful to note his presence and the incident which marked it. They had intoned the Office of the Dead. It appeared to the Pope that those lugubrious chants were little in harmony with the state of a soul already crowned on high. "Leave the Office of the Dead," he said, "and take that of the virgins." "Most Holy Father," replied Cardinal Rinaldo, "perhaps it would be more becoming, in a matter so grave, to act with more maturity." The observation was just : the Pontiff did not insist.*

After the Office, Cardinal Rinaldo delivered the funeral oration. "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity!" he exclaimed, pointing to the half-open coffin. It was with this famous text of Ecclesiastes, the contemporary chronicle tells us, he began his discourse.† Having drawn from it thought-compelling views, he launched into his subject. To be eloquent he had only to let the facts, the works, of the venerable Foundress speak for themselves, and trace in broad outlines the different phases of her life—her radiant childhood ; her youth, beautified by her love of the poor ; her meeting with the Seraphic Patriarch ; her providential mission ; the creation of the Order of Poor Ladies ; the invasion of the Saracens and the liberation of the city ; and, finally, at the close of a long and well-filled career, a most glorious death, setting the last seal on the sanctity of God's elect.

The liturgical prayers once over, the body was deposited in the temporary vault prepared for it, and we are going to see how life sprang therefrom.

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. vii.

† *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XXIX

CANONIZATION (1255)

MIRACLES do not constitute the essence of sanctity, but they are its reflection and authentic sign, the sign by which the Church recognizes those of her children who are enjoying the Beatific Vision. They multiplied to such an extent upon the tomb of the seraphic virgin and throughout all Umbria that our old chronicler, quite accustomed as he was to harvest the fields of the supernatural, pauses in wonder before so many flowering sheaves, and is content to make a selection from them.* By preference he directs his attention to the neighbouring cities, perhaps to show how far popular devotion to the Foundress of the Poor Ladies extended. He notably draws attention to a blind man and an epileptic of Spoleto, a paralyzed woman of Bevagna, a youth of Gubbio, and a gentleman of Perugia, suddenly and radically cured; and—touching detail—a wild deer, carrying off a little girl from Cannara to devour it, dropping its prey as soon as the child utters the name of St. Clare—a dozen supernatural favours in all.†

* *Vita S. Clare*, c. vii.

† The *Acta Sanctorum* reproduce, after Surius, the recital of these twelve facts (August 12)—a recital announced by Thomas of Celano, but which is wanting in

Thus the mortal remains of Clare were not yet cold when she was already loudly invoked as a Saint, and her tomb became a centre of supernatural action and the rallying-point of every human infirmity. The rumour of all these prodigies reached the ears of Innocent IV., who ordered Don Bartholomew, Bishop of Spoleto, to proceed without delay with the canonical investigation. The Apostolic Rescript is dated October 18, 1253, only two months after the death of the venerated Foundress.*

On November 24 of the same year Don Bartholomew began the judicial examination of the cause and the hearing of evidence. The witnesses were the Saint's companions, Sister Pacifica Guelfucci first, affirming on oath what they knew of their Mother's inner life, and gladly publishing traits of heroism, which they were able to discover despite her extreme humility. There were Brothers Leo and Angelo of Rieti, attesting her inviolable attachment to the highest poverty. There were also the miraculously healed coming, one after the other, to tell how, after having knelt at her tomb and implored her assistance, they suddenly rose up cured. Finally, there were the magistrates of Assisi and all its inhabitants proclaiming her titles to public gratitude, and crying out with one unanimous voice : " Yes, she was the guardian angel of the city ! Yes, she has been our

their manuscript. Alexander IV. alludes in the Bull of Canonization to several of these prodigies, but without designating either the names or the locality of the different miracles. He cites, in a general way, the cure of an epileptic, of a blind man, of an incurable wound, and of several paralytics (Bull *Clara Claris*).

* The Poor Clares of the monastery of Assisi possess the original of this brief.

liberatrix ; it was she who delivered us from the invasion of the Saracens !”

Sister Agnes Scefì was no longer there to add her account to these judicial depositions, to these popular acclamations : she had died eight days before the opening of the inquiry. But from the recesses of her tomb she still bore evidence in her own way, for she had lived long enough to see the dawn of triumph rise over the venerated remains of her whom she called Mother, and Clare’s dying prediction was literally fulfilled : “ Thou wilt soon follow me, but not without having first experienced great consolation.”

In the beginning of the year 1254 the record of the inquiry, with the requisite signatures and formalities, was sent to the Infallible Doctor, to whom alone it belongs in such cases to deliver an irreformable judgment. Innocent IV. had died in the interval, and it was to his successor, Alexander IV. —that same Cardinal Rinaldo who had prudently caused to be adjourned on August 12 all the marks of a premature canonization—was reserved the consolation of terminating the process. He was then residing in the palace of Anagni. He had all the documents of the process read in presence of the Cardinals, assembled in Consistory, and adjured them to freely express their opinions. All agreed that there was no need to delay inscribing in the calendar of Saints a name so visibly inscribed in the Book of Life. Alexander IV. signed the decree proclaiming the heroicity of the virtues and the authenticity of the miracles, and fixed the solemn promulgation for August 12, 1225, the second anniversary of

the burial of the seraphic virgin.* A contemporary chronicle adds that it was he who composed the hymns and prayers of the Saint's Office.†

The ceremony of canonization—that unequalled and always novel ovation—took place, in the midst of an immense concourse, in the cathedral of Anagni, adorned with the most beautiful decorations. Explanation of the cause, recital of the deeds and miracles of Clare, liturgical prayers—everything was done with solemnity and in accordance with the rites prescribed by Gregory IX. Then, with hands and eyes raised to heaven, in presence of a moved and meditative multitude, the Successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, pronounced the expected judgment, the irreformable sentence: “By the authority of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and ours, with the unanimous consent of our brethren the Cardinals and Bishops present, placing our confidence in the power of God, we declare her to be inscribed in the calendar of saintly virgins;” fixing the celebration of her feast on August 12.‡

Then he intoned the *Te Deum*, which was continued by thousands of voices in the midst of indescribable enthusiasm, the acclamations of the assemblage, and the joyful pealing of bells. Then also, for the first time, the sacred liturgy, the organ of beliefs, voiced the invocation, *Sancta Clara, ora pro nobis*—“St. Clare, pray for us”—since so often repeated, and always, with a confidence which time has not diminished.

* *Vita S. Claræ*, c. vii.

† Salimbene, *Chronicle of Parma*, p. 194.

‡ *Bull Clara Claris*.

On the morrow of these joyful celebrations the Pontiff officially notified to all the Bishops in the world the great act he had performed. His Bull is a real panegyric, the finest one could deliver in praise of the seraphic virgin. "She has been," said he, "the Princess of the poor, the Duchess of the humble, the example of virgins, the model of penitents. She shines here below by the lustre of her miracles, as she shines on high by the splendour of her merits and her glory. . . . Rejoice, then, O Holy Roman Church ! Clare is thy daughter ; Clare is thine honour by her grand examples of virtue, as by the multitude of virgins she has gained to religious perfection. Rejoice, O pious assembly of the faithful ! she who was your sister, your companion, has been introduced into the heavenly court, that she may intercede in your favour. . . . Rejoice, angels and Saints of paradise ! a new bride has been admitted to the nuptials of the Lamb !"*

Soon the name of the Abbess of St. Damian's was borne to the extremities of the globe. They raised up altars to her, they extolled her virtues, they chanted her in every tongue, and clergy and laity vied in zeal with Franciscans and Poor Clares, France and Spain with Italy, in heaping honours upon her who always fled honours. Thus was verified once more the words of the Divine Master : " Whosoever humbleth himself shall be exalted."

In these pious demonstrations the inhabitants of Assisi distinguished themselves among all, and it was just. Was not the new Saint their fellow-

* Bull *Clara Claris*. The copy quoted by the *Acta Sanctorum* bears date September 26, 1255 (see Appendix).

citizen, their sister, their benefactress? And was not the light which this star shed in the Church's firmament reflected first of all upon her native place, to make its splendour equal to the most illustrious cities? So they were not content with festivals, panegyrics, and bonfires; they wanted more: they wished for a monument worthy of the Saint, a sanctuary which should serve as a pendant to the basilica of St. Francis.

Thanks to Papal munificence, their wishes were soon changed into a splendid reality. In 1260 an elegant edifice, due to the genius of a Franciscan artist, Fra Filippo da Campello, and dedicated to St. Clare, arose on the site of the Church of St. George. The Bishops of Perugia, Spoleto, and Assisi, having enclosed the Saint's body in a travertine urn, sealed and made firm with iron braces, deposited it, in presence of St. Bonaventure and the city magistrates, in a vault hollowed out under the high-altar (October 3); and the Poor Ladies, abandoning the birthplace of their Order, came to take possession of their post of honour, and establish themselves for ever as guardians of their Mother's ashes.* Five years afterwards Clement IV. gave the humble city on Monte Subazio a new testimony of Papal solicitude. He consecrated with his own hand the high-altar under which reposed the shrine. Almost as many honours as for St. Francis, the immortal regenerator of the thirteenth century!

* Wadding, *ad ann.* 1260. Thomas of Celano does not say in what year the translation took place. The monastery of St. Damian, successively occupied by Observantines and the Riformati, was suppressed in 1866. The late Marquis of Ripon purchased it in 1878, and restored it to the Riformati.

It would neither be without interest nor out of place, in passing, to notice the astonishing similitudes which, even in their posthumous glory, approximate the two Saints whose names fill these pages—Francis and Clare. Their cultus is intertwined and their memory is inseparable. They guard the two entrance-gates of the little city they loved so much during the days of their earthly pilgrimage; they seem ever to preside over its destinies, and are the two guardian angels of their native place. This union is affirmed in art no less than in history or sacred liturgy, and since the Umbrian School was created over the tomb of the Seraphic Patriarch, the Giotto's, the Doni, the Sermei, and their successors have not ceased to offer to both Saints the tribute of their talent, in the hope that the glory of both will be reflected on their pencils.

Finally, a last trait of resemblance. The two shrines, buried in the depths of the earth, remained for six centuries enveloped in impenetrable obscurity, and they reappeared in broad daylight within a short interval, equally inviolate, equally adorned with miracles—that of St. Francis in 1818, and that of our heroine thirty-two years afterwards.

We have related in the *Life of St. Francis* the first of these two episodes.* We shall not go back on it, reserving all our attention for the second fact.†

* See illustrated *Life of St. Francis*, third edition, c. xix., p. 365.

† We shall follow, abridging it, the account by Loccatelli, who has devoted no less than four chapters (l. vi., c. iii.-vi.) to the discovery of the body of St. Clare.

CHAPTER XXX

DISCOVERY OF THE SHRINE (1850)

It was in 1850. The discovery of St. Francis's shrine in 1818 had awakened a desire to likewise make a search for the remains of St. Clare. The moment was favourable. The Roman revolution had recoiled before French arms, and Pius IX., the exile of Gaeta, returned triumphantly to his States. The Bishop and magistrates of Assisi solicited and obtained from him the requisite authorization, and immediately set to work.

The excavations lasted seven days. At last, on August 30, 1850, the pickaxe touched the coffin so eagerly sought. The blessed bones were there! On September 28 the Archbishop of Perugia, Monseigneur Pecci—later Pope Leo XIII.—identified the relics, in presence of six other Bishops, the Poor Clares, and the whole Assisian population, and intoned the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for having drawn from the obscurity of the tomb the remains of that seraphic virgin who, in the days of her mortal life, had illumined the world with the splendours of her sanctity.*

Clare emerged from her tomb after a space of five

* See the brief of Leo XIII. to the Bishop of Assisi on August 2, 1900.

hundred and ninety years. She was there in complete preservation, except her flesh. The daughters recognized their Mother. But let us leave themselves to tell, in a letter addressed on that occasion to their Sisters in Marseilles, their first impressions :

“ Oh, happiness ! We saw how the body of our Holy Foundress was preserved for so many centuries. We saw the head slightly inclined, the face turned towards us, the left hand laid on the breast, and the right hand extended. Laurel-leaves, still intact, preserving their natural colour and the flexibility of freshly-cut foliage, encircled her virginal head, and in her right hand were still seen the stems of flowers one had placed there as a symbol of the virtues with which her life was adorned.

“ We unfolded on a table, with all respect, you may believe, the religious habit, the mantle, the hair-cloth, and the inside tunic of our Mother, and then for five hours we could feast our eyes and hearts on the touching sight of those precious liveries of poverty, penitence, and contempt of the world. I leave you to think what sweet emotions we must have experienced, when the holy Bishop of Assisi and the two priests who accompanied him were thrilled with indescribable emotion. How we kissed our Father's coarse tunic ! How we gazed upon the white skin slippers our Mother had made to protect his steps from the sharp pain of the stigmata ! How we gathered up that lint which must have been saturated with his blood ! Here it is, the large white woollen mantle with which the Bishop of Assisi covered our Father's shoulders

when, giving up all to Pietro Bernardone, he stripped himself of everything that he might have nothing more in common with the world. It is indeed the servant's mantle of which historians speak. There it is, the alb our Father used when filling the functions of deacon. Again a work of our Mother! Oh, if you knew the fineness and delicacy of that work! What skill the Saint must have had in that kind of embroidery! . . . Here is her black veil, the same she wore when she was living in this valley of tears. And this hair-shirt, intertwined with cords full of knots, which covered her whole body, with woollen sleeves full of rough surfaces, how heavy it is! You could not hold it without pricking the fingers, or kiss it without hurting the lips. Here, however, O Mother, is what you wore over your delicate flesh! Here indeed is something to put us to shame!

"And our Mother's mantle—it, too, is coarse, poor, and heavy! And this outside tunic, open-worked like ours, how everything about it speaks of poverty! And this inside tunic, still poorer! The sight alone makes one weep. It is only a tissue of pieces patched together; the number could not be counted. They are of every quality, fine and coarse. It is rather a hair-shirt! Oh, dearest Sisters, what an eloquent instruction this exposition of relics was to us!"*

There is nothing fortuitous in the designs of Providence. This sudden reappearance of St. Francis and St. Clare, this re-entrance on the scene

* Letter of the Abbess of Assisi to the Community in Marseilles on October 8, 1851.

of the defenders of the Papacy at a moment when the See of St. Peter was attacked by all the living forces of the Revolution, seemed a good augury to those who did not despair of the future. Pius IX. saw therein a providential succour, and on November 16, 1850, wrote to the Bishop of Assisi: "You have, then, found the body of the virgin Clare, the second Patroness of your city. We are greatly rejoiced by it, and prostrate before Him Who rules everything by His providence, We humbly ask Him, by the merits of St. Clare, to deign, in His mercy, to avert from our country and the whole Christian people the dread scourges of His justice."

The scourges of justice were averted for a time. Mercy prevailed, and an astonished world witnessed the grandest triumphs of the nineteenth century—the splendours of the reign of Pius IX., the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and the definition of the Infallibility of the Pope. One beheld a movement of social renovation and a revival of faith. Religion resumed its sway, churches were repeopled with the faithful, and renowned sanctuaries and places of pilgrimage again saw things like those of the Middle Ages. And among those sanctuaries must be included the basilicas of the two patrons of Assisi—St. Francis and St. Clare, so universally invoked.

The piety of the pilgrims and the honour due to the seraphic virgin required a monument not unworthy of receiving the incomparable treasure of her bones. Pius IX., the Umbrian Episcopate, and the Sovereigns of Italy who in 1850 were not yet dispossessed of their thrones, supported with their

sympathetic encouragement the project of the inhabitants of Assisi ; and soon, with the gold of the wealthy and the pence of the poor, they built in the very place where her body had been so long hidden a subterranean chapel with marble columns, pointed arches, and that half-light so favourable to ardent supplications and solitary meditation.

The translation of the body into the crypt took place on September 29, 1872, in presence of the Archbishop of Perugia, Cardinal Pecci (Leo XIII.), with all the magnificence the captivity of Pius IX. and the political overturn in Italy permitted.

The crypt is at the apse of the basilica of St. Clare. Lamps burn there night and day. There, enclosed in a shrine, in the habit of the Order, her face uncovered, a white lily in her hand, and her brow encircled with a crown of flowers, the " Princess of the Poor " sleeps her last sleep. She is surrounded, as by a guard of honour, by her first companions, who followed her closest in the way of renunciation and sacrifice—Ortolana, her mother ; Agnes and Beatrix Scefì, her two younger sisters ; and Sisters Pacifica Guelfucci, Amata Corano, Agnes Oportula, Benedetta, Christina, Benvenuta of Assisi, and her namesake of Perugia.

She has another, a living guard of honour, a phalanx whose fidelity equals their disinterestedness. They are her daughters, the guardians of her tomb, the heiresses of her spirit. It is not that they may be sheltered from troublesome temptations, injustices, and persecutions ; but when the hour of danger comes, they prostrate themselves on the flags of the crypt where their Mother's body re-

poses ; they pray, and rise up more courageous and more confident, reinvigorated by the primitive spirit of their Order.

Oh, city of Assisi, city of St. Francis and St. Clare, what a brilliant aureola environs thy name, and how glorious are thy pageants !

We bid farewell to the attractive city of Monte Subazio, to its beautiful sky, its mountains and its sanctuaries, which are the gem of Umbria ; but we shall not take our leave of the Foundress of the Poor Ladies without saying a word on the destinies of her spiritual progeny, on the vicissitudes as well as greatness of her Order.

CHAPTER XXXI

VICISSITUDES AND GROWTH OF THE ORDER

THE religious family of St. Clare has grown parallel with that of the Friars Minor, with the same power of expansion, the same inexhaustible vigour, but also—let us hasten to say it—in the midst of vicissitudes which explain to us their common origin, their reciprocal relations, and the difficulties of the Rule. Already, during the lifetime of the Foundress, as we have seen, divergences of sentiments and opinions arose between St. Francis and Cardinal Ugolino, between the Abbess of St. Damian's and the Sovereign Pontiffs. They continued and were accentuated after her death, and the discussions—to the eternal honour of the Poor Clares—never revolved except upon one of the counsels of the Gospel, upon seraphic poverty, to give it more or less prominence.

In 1260 there were three Rules in full force—that of Cardinal Ugolino (1220), successively retouched by Innocent IV. and Alexander IV. ; that of St. Francis (1224) ; and that of Longchamps, composed by St. Bonaventure, and approved by Alexander IV. Hence differences which were fatally to end in a schism. These differences were indicated in the popular denominations attached to the nuns, who

were called here Damianites or Recluses, there Cordeliers or Minoresses, and elsewhere, and oftenest, Poor Ladies. With the object of putting an end to dissensions and restoring unity, so greatly threatened, the Cardinal-Protector of the Order, Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, resolved, in concert with St. Bonaventure, to draw up new Constitutions, based on those of Gregory IX., and authorizing the holding of property and funds. Urban IV. sanctioned them with the plenitude of his authority on October 18, 1263, made them obligatory on all communities in which the Rule of 1224 was not in force, and decreed that henceforward the nuns should bear without distinction the name of Sisters of St. Clare.*

Since then the spiritual family of St. Clare remains divided into two branches, both canonically recognized—the Poor Clares, who followed to the letter and without mitigation the first Rule, or Rule of 1224; and the Urbanist Poor Clares, who adopt the second Rule—that is to say, the Constitutions of Urban IV. Perhaps it would not be useless to add here, in passing, that this second Rule, despite its mitigations, remains none the less one of the most austere in the Church.

In the fifteenth century the Order was reformed, or, to put it better, led back to its primitive fervour, by a great apostle and a famous wonder-worker, St. Bernardine of Siena and St. Colette of Corbie. They succeeded, the one in Italy, the other in France, at a short interval, in putting in force in a

* Bull *Beata Clara* (*Bullar. Francisc.*, t. ii., p. 509), and Wadding, *ad ann.* 1263. For the foundation at Longchamps, see author's *Life of St. Bonaventure*.

large number of communities the Rule composed by St. Francis. Moreover, to maintain regular observance, St. Colette drew up particular Constitutions, which still to-day govern many monasteries. In 1540 Mother Mary Longo imitated her example, erecting in Naples a monastery of Poor Clares, under the jurisdiction of Friars Minor Capuchin; she gave her daughters distinct Constitutions, which are equivalent to those of St. Colette.*

These divisions, all this falling away, all these historic changes we have been passing in review, will surprise no one. They are inherent in the infirmity of the human heart. But have they affected the vitality of the Order? Have they prevented its accomplishing its mission and answering to the expectations of Christian society? Facts of themselves in this respect bear the test of science, for it is the same with a monastic Order as with a tree. A tree is not judged by the hoar-frost that tests it nor the winds that shake it, but by the abundance and savour of the fruits it bears. The fruits of the Religious Congregations are the Saints. They are only planted in the garden of the Church—and they know it—to produce Saints, and as long as the Papacy can gather from their branches one of those fruits, to place it on its altars, it can believe that the Divine sap is not dried up in their veins,

* To the Order of Poor Clares are allied the Conceptionists, founded at Toledo in 1489 by the Blessed Beatrice de Silva, and the most celebrated of whom is the Venerable Mary of Agreda and the Annonciades, founded in Bourges in 1501 by St. Jeanne de Valois. See *L'Auréole Séraphique*, August 12.

and that the breath of the Holy Spirit still animates them. The Saints!—there is the irrefutable proof of their fecundity, their most precious crown, the foundation of their real greatness! Happy the Congregations whose brows are thus garlanded from age to age with those generous souls—virgins, confessors, or martyrs—who have practised even to heroism self-forgetfulness, the love of God, and fraternal charity!

Few Religious Orders are more favoured in this respect than the three great Institutions of the Seraphic Patriarch; and the Poor Clares, despite the obscurity of a life of complete abnegation, may yet, and justly, claim here their share of glory along with the Friars Minor and Tertiaries.* Each branch has its distinctions.

The Poor Clares count, besides the general Foundress, four Saints and twelve beatified; the Urbanists, six beatified—in all, twenty-three names inscribed in the sacred diptychs, twenty-three figures environed with a more resplendent nimbus, headed by St. Clare, the pearl of the thirteenth century, and St. Colette of Corbie, the great reformer of the fifteenth century and the friend of Joan of Arc.

But, beside these heroines of penitence honoured with a public cultus, how many others, under the habit of the Poor Clares, have diffused around them the good odour of Christ! How many thousands of chosen souls have passed through these cloisters, have perfumed them with their virtues, and fled from thence towards the eternal hills! The world

* The Friars Minor in their three branches reach the figure of 147 Saints, or *beati*; the Third Order of St. Francis has 91.

ignores them, and yet what greatness in those characters and what glory in those names !

In Spain it is Eleanor, daughter of Charles IV. of Naples, and Madeleine Xavier, Abbess of Gandia, and eldest sister of St. Francis Xavier, who owed to her his Apostolic vocation ;* in Portugal, Helena of Saint-Antoine, daughter of Alphonsus III. ; in Italy, Queen Sancha, widow of Robert of Naples ; in the former States of Germany, Anne of Austria, daughter of the Emperor Frederick III. ; in Poland, the sixty Poor Clares of Cracow, massacred by the Tartars (1259) ; and in the East, those of Ptolemaïs, fallen under the swords of the Saracens (1291). France is not less rich in young girls or widows of high birth who have sought in the cloister the peace which the world did not give them, and from St. Clare the secret of pure joys and imperishable greatness. We quote at random. In the abbey of Longchamps, Marguerite of Provence, wife of St. Louis ; Blanche, their daughter ; another Blanche, daughter of Philip I. ; in the monastery of Orbe, Louise of Savoy, granddaughter — by her mother — of Charles VII. ; in Amiens, Isabeau and Marie de Bourbon, daughters of Jacques de Bourbon, helpers of St. Colette and Foundresses of the monastery of Amiens ; at Lezignan, Bonne d'Armagnac, niece of the two preceding and fervent imitator of St. Colette ; among the Poor Clares of Argentan, Margaret of Lorraine, widow of Count René d'Alençon ;

* Sister Madeleine, learning that her father wanted to withdraw from his studies the young Xavier, begged him to give up the project, assuring him that this young brother would one day be an incomparable preacher and the apostle of the Indies (*Acta SS.*, October 10).

at Pont-à-Mousson, Philippe de Gueldre, widow of René II. of Lorraine ;* at Grenoble, Jeanne Baile, daughter of the President of the Parliament of Dauphiné ; at Toulouse, the gentle Germaine d'Armaing, who had for her motto, " To love or die."

Let us stop. In these monastic coats of arms, in this long martyrology, which is daily enriched, patricians mingle with plebeians, historic names of Old Europe with those of the New World, the lilies of virginity with the roses of martyrdom. What dominates, what binds all these names together, what captures and captivates us, is the superhuman beauty of those souls who, running counter to so many others, desire to place no obstacle either to the oblation they make of themselves to God or their unwearied charity to men. For Christ they learn to deprive themselves of everything—for Christ to suffer, for Christ to die.

Of the one hundred thousand nuns France counts to-day, there are from eleven to twelve hundred Poor Clares, eager to walk in the footsteps of their Foundress. In response to their wishes, and to close this volume, we cannot do better than place before their eyes and offer for their meditation a document which has its value because it emanates from a contemporary and a friend of their Foundress. It is a letter addressed by Alexander IV. in 1257 to the nuns of St. Damian's, and which might be entitled, " Of the Imitation of St. Clare."

" Daughters blessed by the Lord," he wrote, " our heart is still inebriated with the spiritual delights we have tasted in our conversations with your

* See the *Bio-Bibliographie* of U. Chevalier.

Mother. That is why we judge it fitting to exhort your whole community to profit by the lessons of your Saint. Be impressed by her example, be fervent in the service of God, you who, coming immediately after her, are called to become in your turn a light and mirror to your companions. Strive by constant imitation and as much as grace will permit you to revive in yourselves her qualities and her virtues, keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace and mutual charity, attentive to acquire the merits of obedience, full of forethought and respect for each other, and persevering unflinchingly in the integrity of sincere love, in the practice of humility, benevolence, and other virtues, and in all the works of holiness. Thus the Mother will have daughters worthy of her, and the monastic tree she has planted will be laden with fruits pleasing to the Most High."*

* Brief *Largifluæ Paternæ*, Viterbo, October 17, 1257 (*Bullar. Francisc.*, t. ii., p. 252).

APPENDIX

TESTAMENT OF ST. CLARE*

IN THE NAME OF THE LORD. AMEN.

I. Among the signal graces we have received and continually receive from our benefactor, the Father of Mercies, there is one for which we are more obliged to show Him our gratitude ; and this is precisely the grace of our vocation, which, inasmuch as it is the most perfect, so much the more does it claim our gratitude ; and after the example of the first Christians we ought to remember what St. Paul wrote to them : " Know thy vocation." The same Son of God has called us to Himself, and the acts and words of the Blessed St. Francis, His true lover and imitator, have led us up to this day in the straightest path. Then, O most beloved Sisters, let us not forget the benefits which the Lord grants us, and this especially, which He has deigned to share among us through the medium of His great servant, Blessed Francis, not only after our conversion, but when we were still wandering amid the world's tempests. He, a little after his call, when he had not yet either companions or sisters, and was repairing the church of St. Damian, possessed by the Holy Spirit, and rejoicing at abandoning the vanities of the world, predicted of us all that has

* From an old manuscript memorial quoted by Wadding, *ad ann.* 1253—*Orb. Seraph.*, t. ii., p. 614.

miraculously come to pass. After repairing the walls of the said church, he called the poor men who dwelt near here, and, speaking to them in the French language, exclaimed aloud: "Come here, brothers; help me in building the monastery of St. Damian, for here in a short time will dwell some ladies, by whose piety our Heavenly Father will be glorified throughout all His Holy Church." Oh, we may, then, bless the immense goodness of God, Who, in His mercy and charity towards us, has deigned to prophesy these things relative to our vocation, and to the choice He has pleased to make of us.

II. And our Blessed Father predicted that not only of us, but spoke collectively of all who by their holy vocation should become sharers in our lot. For that reason, with what zeal, with what faith, with what constancy we should observe the commandments of God, and the rules of our holy Founder, that in the last day we may appear before our Judge, bringing to Him the talent confided to us multiplied! We have been chosen by Him to be the model and the mirror of the faithful, and of other Sisters who will be called to the profession of our Institute, that they also in their turn may edify the world by their virtue: wherefore we, predestined to such great things, are doubly bound to bless the Lord, and always praise Him, and conform ourselves to Him by doing good with His Divine assistance. In this way we may leave others a noble example of virtue, and at the cost of momentary and passing sacrifices gain the reward of eternal happiness.

III. After that the Most High, our Heavenly Father, deigned by a stroke of His immense mercy to enlighten my mind and soften my heart, when, with the example and instructions of the most Blessed Francis, I did penance. Not long after his conversion I, with a few

companions whom the Lord had given me, promised voluntary obedience, conformably with what the Lord Himself had manifested to me by His grace. Then the Saint, considering that, although we were weak as to the flesh, nevertheless we had not refused to endure poverty, tribulations, fatigues, humiliation, and the world's contempt, and that also these things were accounted by us great joys, after his own example and that of his Friars Minor, whom he had often sent us to try us, then the Saint, I say, rejoiced in the Lord, and, moved to compassion for us, undertook together with his religious to have a care of us, as well as of themselves. And thus, by the will of the Lord and of our Blessed Father Francis, we came to dwell in the monastery of St. Damian, after remaining for a short time in another place; and there the ever-merciful and good Lord deigned to multiply His grace, so that the profession of His servant might take place.

IV. About that time the Saint himself gave us in writing our Rule of life, where is chiefly inculcated perseverance in holy poverty. Nor was he content with exhorting us to the constant practice of this precious virtue by his own example and instructions, but was pleased, besides the Rule, to leave as many written maxims relative thereto, in order that after his death it would be impossible to leave the path he had marked out for us; and we faithfully kept our promises, precisely like the Son of God, Who never departed from the same blessed poverty, and like our blessed Father, St. Francis, who, walking in the footsteps of the Divine Master, chose for his inheritance abnegation and perfect aversion to earthly goods.

V. However, I, Clare, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ and of the Poor Servants of the monastery of

St. Damian, although I am a useless plant in the Lord's field, considering the excellence of your profession, the commands of our Holy Father, and the weakness of our nature (which above all ought to be feared by us after the death of him who might be called our column, and was, after God, our support and our only consolation), together with the other Sisters aggregated to my Order, twice voluntarily bound myself to the observance of the most holy Poverty, our Lady, so that after my death the present and future Sisters cannot on any pretence depart from it. Pay attention, then, with all diligence and solicitude, not only to the fulfilment of the promise I have made to God and our Father, St. Francis, but also cause it to be equally observed by others. To better secure that our profession be not altered, I left nothing unsaid to procure its confirmation by our Holy Father, Pope Innocent III., under whose Pontificate our Order began, and that those who succeeded him in the Chair of Peter should corroborate it with their supreme sanction.

VI. I equally recommend my present and future Sisters to the successor of the Blessed Francis, our Father and Founder, and to all his religious, in order that they may help us to serve God better, and preserve holy poverty by their instructions and example ; and I pray them with all the humility of which I am capable to see that, weak little plants as we are, we may never waver in our sacred promises. If at any time it should happen that the aforesaid Sisters should leave this monastery to go elsewhere, I ardently desire that wherever they find themselves they should keep in all its integrity the Rule we now profess. And therefore let all the nuns, she who holds the office of Abbess as well as the others, be careful not to acquire or receive any land in the

vicinity of the convent, except what would suffice for a little garden to produce the necessary vegetables. If, then, at any time, for the sake of decorum, or on account of distance, it should be necessary that they should have more ground besides this solitary garden, I wish that this ground should not be tilled or sown in any way, but that it should always remain sodden and uncultivated.

VII. I also exhort and beg all my Sisters, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, to take heed to always walk in the way of holy simplicity, humility, and poverty, and likewise to observe what is becoming in holy intercourse, as our glorious Patriarch, St. Francis, taught us on this point, that we renounce worldly vanities. Only by means of these virtues, and not by our own merits, but by the grace and mercy of Him Who has chosen us for such a great destiny, can we spread abroad the odour of a good reputation—not only to Sisters at a distance, but to those in our vicinity. And loving one another in the charity of Jesus Christ, make this love, nestling within you, outwardly show itself in good works; and so the Sisters, instigated by your example, will profit immensely in the love of God and their neighbour. I pray, besides, her who in her office will have to govern others to strive to raise herself above them more by her modest manners and virtues than by the dignity with which she is invested, so that the Sisters, animated by her good example, may render obedience not so much through duty as through love. Let her, then, have towards her spiritual daughters all the tenderness and vigilance that a good mother would have towards her own offspring, and provide each, according as she needs, with those things which Providence may have distributed to us. Let her, moreover, be humble, benignant,

accessible in manner, so that they may not fear to entirely open their hearts to her or manifest to her on all occasions, if it appears expedient to them, their own wants and those of their companions. But, then, the Sisters who are subject should remember that for the love of God they have renounced their own will, and that consequently they ought to obey their Mother, as they spontaneously and willingly have promised the Lord, so that she, seeing charity, humility, and union reigning among you, may feel less the burden of her charge, that what is troublesome and bitter therein may be changed into sweetness by the holiness of your life.

VIII. Strict, it is true, is the life one leads, and narrow is the door that leads to life ; few, therefore, are those who walk and enter by it : some tread the same way for a time ; on the other hand, there are very few who persevere to the end. Let us dread, then, O my Sisters, their disgrace ; let us envy the lot of those to whom it has been given to go forward with faith and constancy ; and let us take care that, after having embraced the Lord's life, we may not depart from it through negligence or ignorance, to the injury of our Divine Master, His most holy Mother, our Father, the Blessed Francis, and the Church Triumphant and Militant, which has its eyes fixed on our conduct. It is written : " Accursed are those who abandon Thy commandments " ; wherefore, humbly genuflecting in the sight of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I beg Him that, having granted us the grace to begin well, He would also grant us that of final perseverance, through the merits of the glorious Virgin, of our Blessed Father Francis, and of all the Saints. Amen.

IX. That these things may be the better observed by each of you, I leave it to you in writing, O my dearest

Sisters, present and future, in token of the blessing of the Lord and of our most Blessed Father, St. Francis, who am your Mother and your servant.

BLESSING OF ST. CLARE

The following is the text of this blessing, such as it is transmitted to us by Mark of Lisbon :*

IN THE NAME OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY. AMEN.

DEAREST SISTERS,

May the Lord bless and guard you ; may He show you His face, and may He have mercy on you ; may He turn His glances towards you, and may He give you His peace !

May He likewise bless all the Sisters, whether of this community or of other houses of the Order, who shall come to us and persevere to the end in holy poverty.

I, Clare, servant of Christ, little flower of St. Francis, your Sister and your Mother, although unworthy, pray our Redeemer, through the intercession of His most holy Mother, St. Michael the Archangel, the holy angels, and all the Saints, to give you and confirm you this most holy blessing in heaven and on earth—on earth by multiplying His graces, in heaven by placing you among His elect.

I bless you, as much as I can and more than I can, during my life and for the times which will follow my death.†

* *Chronicles*, Italian translation, Venetian edition, 1582, t. i., l. viii., c. xxxiv. The French manuscripts give a similar version, with some variations and paraphrases. We note, with the Quaracchi Fathers, that the primitive manuscripts of St. Colette contain some additions, of which she is *perhaps* the author. (See *Textus Originales*, p. 284.)

† *Textus Originales*, p. 281.

BULL FOR THE CANONIZATION OF ST. CLARE*

“ Alexander, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God :
to all our venerable Brethren, Archbishops, Bishops,
etc., health and Apostolic Benediction.

“ Clare, more illustrious by the brilliancy of her merits than by her name, rejoices in the brightness of great glory in heaven, and by the lustre of sublime miracles on earth. Here below she shines by the austerity and high aims of her Order, on high by the greatness of her eternal rewards, dazzling the eyes of mortals by her magnificent virtues. Here she obtained the privilege of absolute poverty, but on high she possesses an inestimable wealth of treasures, as the prayers of the whole Catholic world and accumulated honours attest. Here the splendour of her good works has made her famous ; on high the fulness of the Divine light illumines her, as the stupendous marvels of her miracles declare to all Christendom. O Clare, illustrious by so many titles !—illustrious before thy conversion, more illustrious in thy conversion, more illustrious still in thy cloistral life, and most illustrious after finishing thy course on earth ! In Clare a bright example is presented as a mirror to this world. She has added to the delights of paradise the delightful lily of her virginity, while the efficacy of her succour is made manifest on earth. O admirable lustre of the Blessed Clare ! the more it is studied in detail, the more brilliancy is discovered in every feature. It has diffused its light over the world as well as in the religious life ; in the home it shines like a ray, in the cloister it glitters like lightning. It shone during her lifetime ; after her death

* Wadding, *Annal. Minor.* (an. 1255) ; Bull *Clara Claris*.

its beams extend far and wide ; it illumined the earth, it now illumines heaven. Oh, great as the power of this light, is the greatness of its illumination ! This light, indeed, remained enclosed in the privacy of the cloister, but shed abroad its shining rays ; though confined within a convent cell, it spread itself all over the world. Preserved within, it diffused itself without : for though Clare was hidden, her life was made manifest ; Clare was silent, but her fame was loud-voiced ; confined within a convent cell, she was known in cities. Nor is it to be wondered at, for a light so burning and luminous could not be hidden, but should flash forth and add lustre to the house of God ; a vessel so full of perfumes could not be kept closed, but should diffuse its fragrance and its sweet odours throughout the Master's mansion ; yea, rather, when in the close seclusion of solitude she broke the alabaster vase of her body with austerities, the whole Church sanctuary was filled with the odours of her sanctity. Modest in herself from a tender age, while still a young girl her thoughts were bent on fleeing from this perishable world, and, ever discreetly guarding the precious treasure of her virginity, diligent in the performance of works of charity and piety, her reputation extending, spread her fame and her praises to neighbouring places. Reaching the ears of the Blessed Francis, he forthwith began to exhort her and lead her on to the perfect service of Christ. She, promptly adopting his holy counsels, and longing to abandon the world and all things worldly, and serve God alone in voluntary poverty, as quickly as she could gave effect to her fervent desire ; so that she converted into alms and distributed to the poor all her possessions, that she might devote herself and all she had to the service of Christ ; and, fleeing from the tumult of this world, she repaired to a little country

church, where she was received by the Blessed Francis himself, and afterwards proceeded to another. Her relatives seeking to forcibly remove her, she, straightway embracing the altar and seizing the altar-cloths, showing her shorn head to them, resisted with firmness and constancy, because she was now already joined to God with her whole mind, and no power could detach her from His service. Finally, when she was led by the same Blessed Francis to the church of St. Damian, outside the city of Assisi, whence she derived her origin, there the Lord associated several companions with her, devoted to the love and worship of His Name. There the noble and holy Order of St. Damian, long spread over the globe, took its rise. She, encouraged by the Blessed Francis himself, began this new and holy observance ; this was the birthplace and solid foundation of this great Order, this the first stone of this lofty edifice. There, noble by birth, but nobler in her conversation, under this rule of holy living she preserved the virginity which even before she had guarded. Afterwards her mother, named Ortolana, devoted to good works, entered this Order, following devoutly in her daughter's footsteps ; here at last this excellent Ortolana, who had produced such a plant in the Lord's garden, ended her days happily. After some years the Blessed Clare herself, her reluctance overcome by the earnest importunity of St. Francis, undertook the government of her monastery and her Sisters. She was, indeed, a lofty and conspicuous tree, with wide-reaching branches, which bore the sweet fruit of religion in the field of the Church, and under whose delightful and pleasant shade gathered, and still gather, so many of the faithful to taste this same fruit. She was a fresh adornment to the Valley of Spoleto, which drank at this new fountain of

living water set up for the refreshment and advantage of souls, which now, through various tributary rivulets, fertilizes many nurseries of religion. She was the lofty candlestick of sanctity burning brightly in the tabernacle of the Lord, to whose great splendour hastened and hasten so many, lighting their lamps by its light. She has planted in the productive soil of faith, and cultivated the vineyard of poverty, from which are gathered rich, ripe fruits of salvation. She has made a garden of humility in the Church's grounds, combining poverty with many other things, in which virtues are acquired in great abundance. In this sphere of the religious life she reared a citadel of rigid abstinence, in which a liberal supply of spiritual nutriment is provided. She was the Princess of the poor, the Duchess of the humble, the Mistress of the chaste, and the Abbess of the penitent. She governed her monastery and the community confided to her with solicitude and prudence, in the fear and service of the Lord and in the perfect observance of her Order—vigilant in oversight, careful in administration, attentive in exhorting, diligent in admonishing, moderate in correcting, temperate in ordering, excelling in compassion, discreet in silence, mild in speech, having on every occasion in view perfection in ruling, wishful rather of serving than commanding, of honouring rather than being raised to honours. Her life was a teaching and instruction to others. In this book of life they learnt the rule of life ; in this mirror of life they beheld the narrow way that leads to the other life. For, while she remained on earth bodily, spiritually her soul's gaze was turned towards heaven : a vessel of humility, a treasury of chastity, a furnace of charity, the sweet essence of benignity, the strength of patience, the bond of peace, and the link that unites souls in

holy intercourse ; meek in speech, mild in action, and lovable and beloved in all things. And, according as she weakened the flesh, she grew strong in the spirit : for whoever weakens his enemy is thereby made stronger. She used the bare ground and sometimes twigs as her bed, and hard wood in place of a pillow under her head ; content with a single tunic and mantle of poor, mean, coarse stuff, underneath these humble garments which covered her body she wore next to the skin a rough hair-shirt, interwoven with cords of horsehair. Austere also in eating and drinking, she observed such rigorous abstinence that for a long time she passed three days each week—that is, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday—without partaking of any food ; nevertheless, she so restricted the little food she took on other days that everybody wondered how she could subsist on such rigorous abstinence. Applying herself, besides, assiduously to vigils and prayers, she spent days and nights in these pious exercises. When stricken with prolonged illness, so that she could not rise to take bodily exercise without the help of her Sisters, with props to her back she worked with her own hands that she might not be idle even in her infirmity ; then by her skill and labour she made many linen corporals for the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, which were distributed among various churches in the valleys and mountains round Assisi. Truly a special lover and sedulous cultivator of poverty, her mind was so fixed on it, her desires were so bound up in it, that, ever growing stronger and more ardent in her love of it, never on any account would she release herself from the close and loving alliance she had made with it. Nor could she be persuaded by anybody to consent that her monastery should hold property of its own, although our predecessor, Pope Gregory, of blessed memory, piously

bestowing many indulgences on her monastery, freely wished to assign to her, for the support of her Sisters, sufficient and suitable possessions. Truly such a magnificent and splendid luminary could not be hidden, but that its rays should show forth its lustre. Even in her life the power of her sanctity was made manifest in many and various miracles, for to one of the Sisters of her monastery she restored the use of her voice, which she had lost for a long time ; to another the use of her tongue, of which she had been deprived ; while the deaf ears of others were opened to hearing. By making the sign of the Cross over them, she delivered others labouring under fever, dropsical swellings, fistula, and various maladies. She cured a Friar of the Order of Minors of insanity. When also on one occasion there was a total want of oil in the monastery, she, having called the Brother who was deputed to collect alms for the said monastery, took the vessel, cleaned it, and placed it empty near the doors of the monastery, that the same Brother might take it to quest for oil ; but when he went to take it up he found it full of oil, through the goodness of the Divine beneficence. Again, when one day they had nothing but half a loaf of bread to feed the Sisters in the same monastery, she ordered it to be broken up into fragments and distributed to the Sisters, when He Who is the Living Bread, and giveth food to the hungry, multiplied it to that extent in the hands of the Sister who was breaking it into pieces that there were fifty portions distributed to the Sisters seated at table. By these and other conspicuous signs, while she was still living, was the pre-eminence of her merits made known. And when she was dying, a white-robed company of blessed virgins, adorned with shining crowns, one of whom appeared more eminent and brighter than the

others, was seen to enter her cell, where lay this same servant of God, and approach her bed, and encircle her, as if, through motives of humanity, to afford her by this visit solace and comfort. After her death, a man who suffered from epilepsy, and, on account of the contraction of the muscles, could not walk, when brought to her tomb was there cured of both infirmities, after the sound, as it were, of a breaking in the limb. Those who suffered from renal maladies, contracted members, and fatal fits of fury and madness were completely cured. One who had lost the use of his right hand through a violent percussion, so that he could do nothing with it, and it had become entirely unavailable for his work, had it completely restored to its previous vigour through the merits of this Saint. Another who had lost the sight of his eyes through protracted blindness, when led to the same tomb, under another's guidance, there recovered his sight, and returned thence without needing anyone to guide him. By these and many other works and miracles this venerable virgin shone gloriously, so that there evidently appears to have been fulfilled what her own mother, while she still bore her and prayed, is said to have heard—namely, that the child she was about to bring forth would be a light that would illumine the whole world. Therefore Mother Church rejoices that she should have begotten and reared such a daughter, the fruitful parent, as it were, of virtues, who by her example bred so many religious, and in the plenitude of her authority formed them to the perfect service of Christ. The devout multitude of the faithful rejoices that the Lord, the King of Heaven, has introduced with glory into His lofty and luminous palace their sister and companion, whom He chose as His spouse. And now the heavenly host unite in rejoicing that in their supernal

abode the nuptials of this new royal spouse are celebrated. Wherefore, as it is fitting that whom God has exalted in heaven the Catholic Church should venerate on earth, and as the sanctity of her life and miracles, having previously been diligently and attentively examined, both locally and in solemn deliberations, is clearly established, and, likewise, as both in neighbouring and remote regions her bright deeds are sufficiently known, we, with the counsel and assent of our brethren, all the Prelates of the Apostolic See, confiding in the Divine omnipotence, by the authority of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and our own, order her to be inscribed in the catalogue of saintly virgins. Wherefore we direct you all, and earnestly exhort you, by these Apostolic letters addressed to you, that on the second of the Ides of August* you shall devoutly and solemnly celebrate the feast of this virgin, and cause it to be reverentially celebrated by those subject to you, so that we may merit to have her as our pious and sedulous helper with God. And as a great and eager multitude of Christian people throng to venerate her tomb, and that her feast may be more and more lovingly celebrated, by the authority confided to us through the mercy of Almighty God and of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, we grant to all who, being truly penitent and having confessed, shall go there reverentially every year on the feast of this virgin, or even within the octave of her feast, to humbly seek her suffrages, one year and forty days' indulgences.

“ Given at Anagni, on the fourteenth of the kalends of November, † in the first year of our Pontificate.”

* August 12.

. † September 26.

CATALOGUE OF SAINTS AND BEATÆ OF THE
SECOND ORDER*

St. Clare of Assisi (1253).
St. Agnes of Assisi (1253).
St. Colette (1447).
St. Catherine of Bologna (1462).
St. Veronica Giuliani (1727).
Blessed Philippa Mareri (1236).
Blessed Helena of Padua (1242).
Blessed Salome (1268).
Blessed Isabelle of France (1270).
Blessed Agnes of Bohemia (1280).
Blessed Margaret Colonna (1284).
Blessed Cunegunda (1292).
Blessed Yolande (1298).
Blessed Mathia Nazzarei (1300).
Blessed Clare of Rimini (1346).
Blessed Felicia Meda (1444).
Blessed Antonietta of Florence (1472).
Blessed Serafino Sforza (1478).
Blessed Eustazia of Messina (1484).
Blessed Luigia of Savoy (1503).
Blessed Paula Montaldi of Mantua (1514).
Blessed Baptista Varani (1527).
Blessed Mary Magdalen Martinengo (1737).

CAUSES INTRODUCED

Ven. Jeanne Marie de la Croix, who founded five monasteries,
and died at Roveredo, in the Tyrol (1673).
Ven. Febronia Ansaloni, virgin, who died in Palermo (1718).
Ven. Antonia Maria Belloni, virgin (1719).
Ven. Angela Maria Astorch, virgin, born at Barcelona, and
Foundress of the monasteries of Saragossa and Murcia
(1765).

* The year indicates the date of death.

- Ven. Florida Ceoli, virgin, disciple of St. Veronica Giuliani, who died at Citta di Castello (1767).
Ven. Clara Isabella Gherzy, virgin, of the monastery of Gubbio, in Umbria (1800).
Ven. Luigia Biagini, virgin, lay Sister in the Urbanist monastery of Lucca (1811).
Ven. Mary of Agreda, virgin, Conceptionist, author of *The Mystical City of God* (1665).
Ven. Mary of Jesus, Mexican, Conceptionist.
Ven. Girolama of the Assumption, of Manilla.
- Several other causes are in process of promotion.

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